

Florida

Hunting the Gray Ghosts
Carver in the Sun

*Fishing • Hunting
• Conservation •
Outdoor Recreation*

WILDLIFE

SEPTEMBER 1975

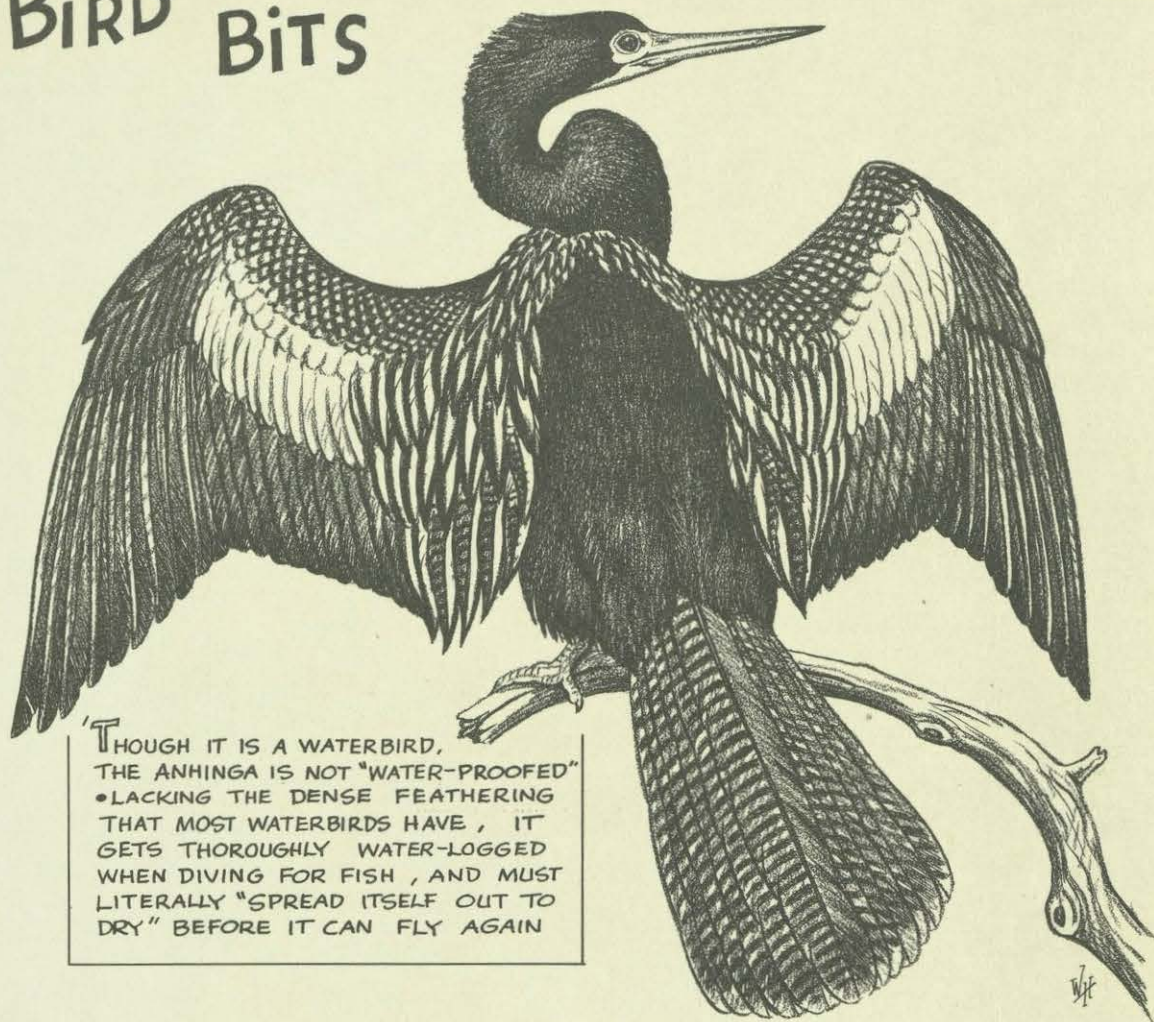
The Florida Magazine for all Sportsmen

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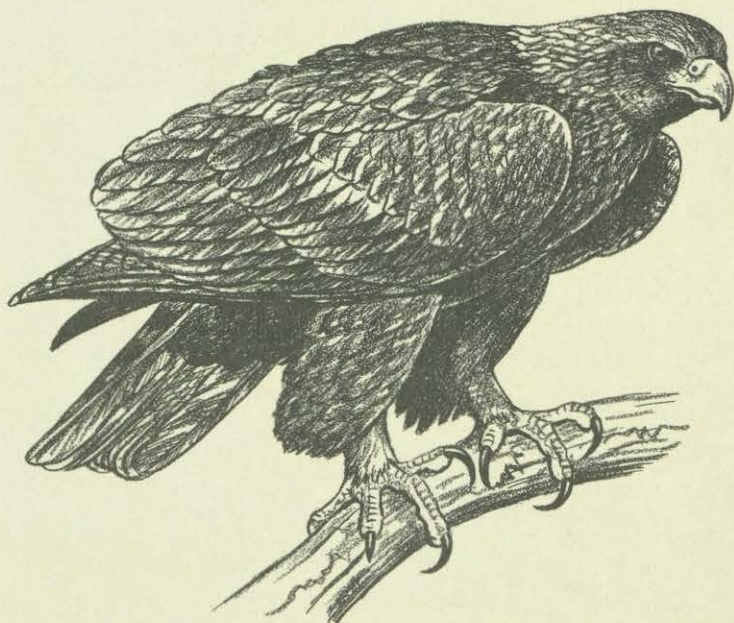


Florida Wildlife Scrapbook

BIRD BITS



THOUGH IT IS A WATERBIRD, THE ANHINGA IS NOT "WATER-PROOFED" • LACKING THE DENSE FEATHERING THAT MOST WATERBIRDS HAVE, IT GETS THOROUGHLY WATER-LOGGED WHEN DIVING FOR FISH, AND MUST LITERALLY "SPREAD ITSELF OUT TO DRY" BEFORE IT CAN FLY AGAIN



POINT TO PONDER FROM THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION'S NEWS BULLETIN "CONSERVATION NEWS" — IF A GOLDEN EAGLE CAN EAT ONE JACKRABBIT PER DAY (WHICH IT CAN) AND IF EIGHT JACKRABBITS WILL EAT AS MUCH GRAIN AS ONE 800 LB. STEER (WHICH THEY WILL), DOES IT THEN FOLLOW THAT WHEN SOMEBODY ILLEGALLY SHOOTS AN EAGLE, HE SAVES THE LIVES OF 365 RABBITS AND STARVES 45 HEAD OF CATTLE ?

SEPTEMBER 1975

official publication of the
Game & Fresh Water Fish Commission
State of Florida

★

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The Cover

When is a mallard not a duck? When it's an artfully contrived wood sculpture by hunter-carver Henry Brewer of Tallahassee. Henry has winning ways with a block of sugar pine and a paint brush. See page 16.

Kodachrome Photo By William A. Greer

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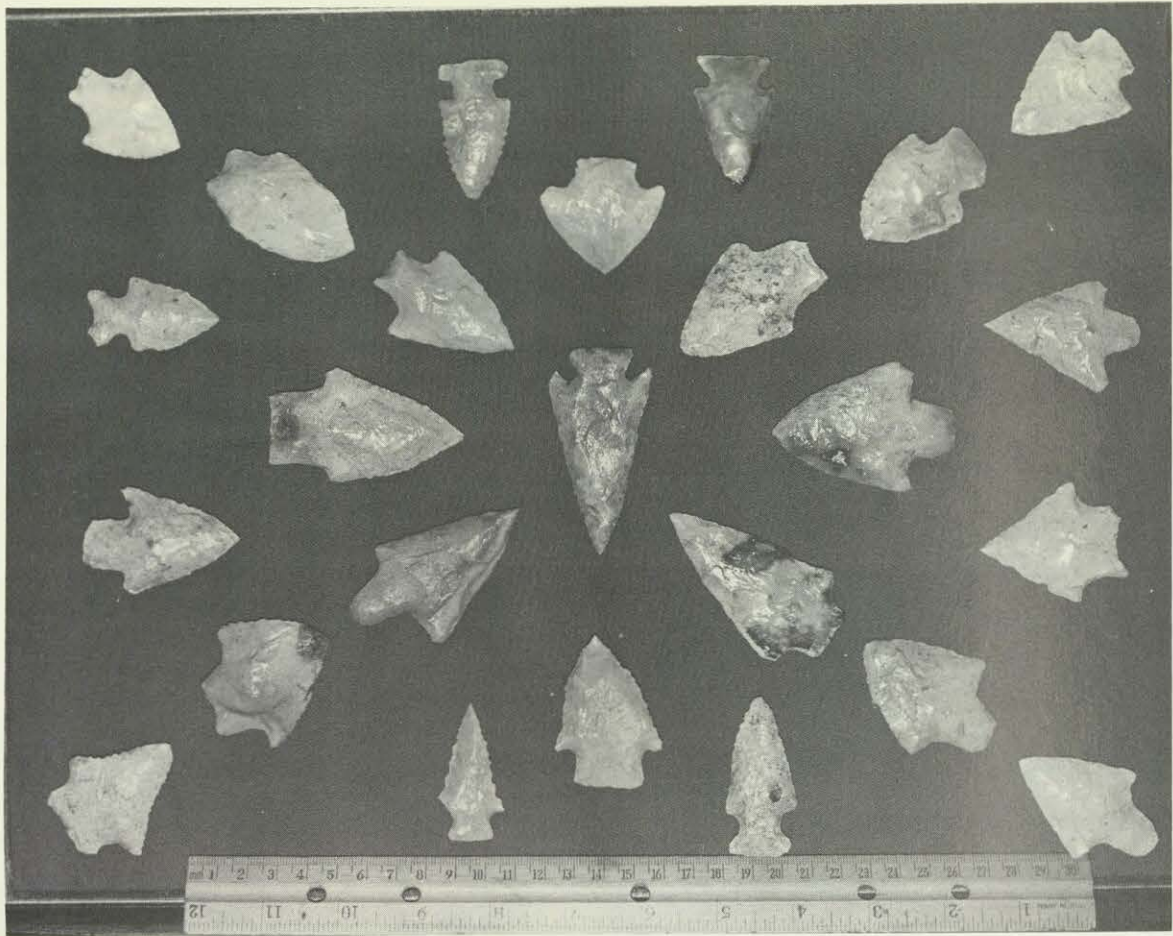
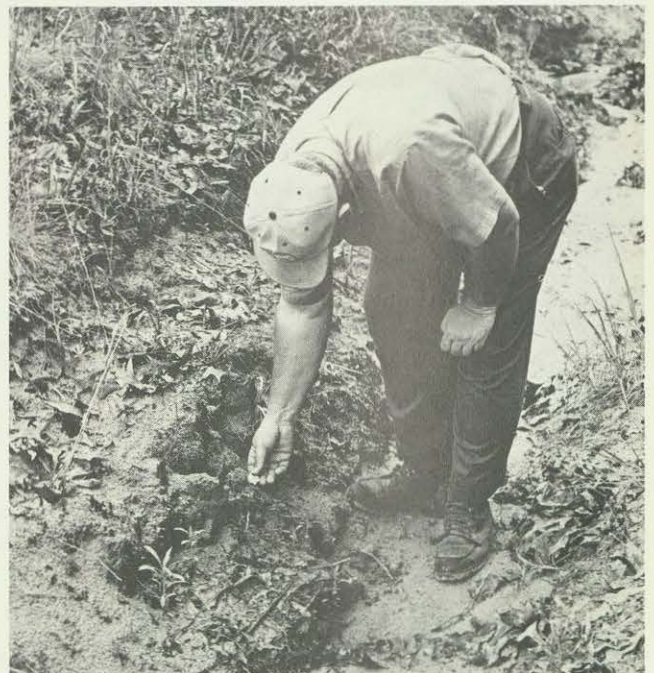


Photo By Laurence Rossignol

A Peek At The Past

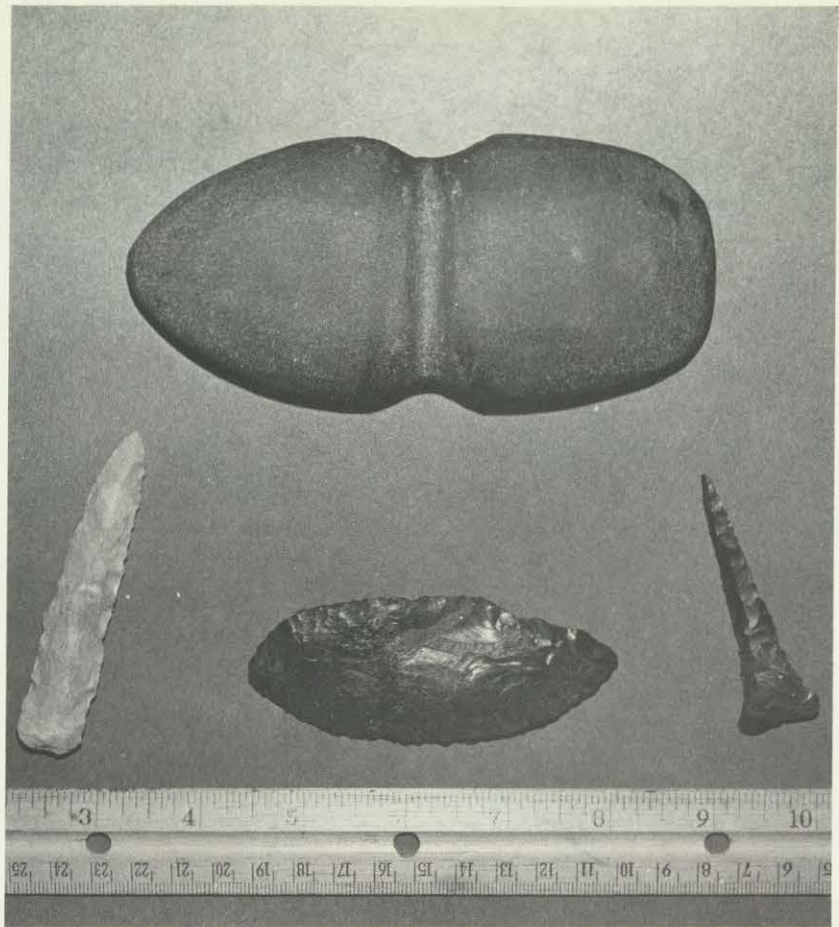
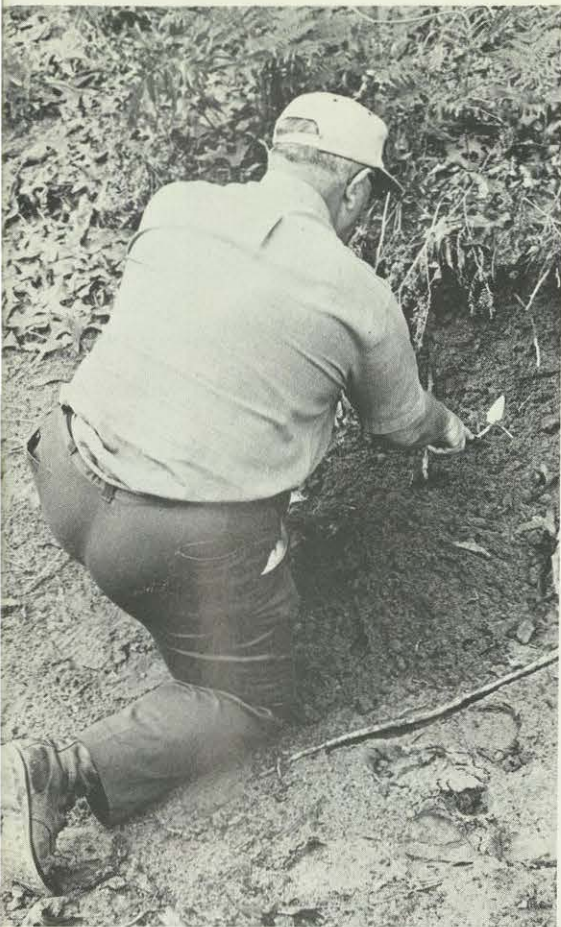
RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY the rivers, lakes and forests of Florida are being utilized more and more as people continue to seek escape from the asphalt and concrete of urban dwelling. Although fishing, hunting, boating, and camping remain the most popular, interest in many other activities is also on the upswing. One of the most rewarding is collecting Indian artifacts.

Most folks think that Indian relics are rare and that finding them is an unusual occurrence. That's not the case, however. Hundreds are found incidentally every year by hunters as they cross eroded places in the woods or walk down graded roads, by farmers as they tend their fields, and by fishermen wandering along riverbanks and lakesides. These stone points and tools date from those used



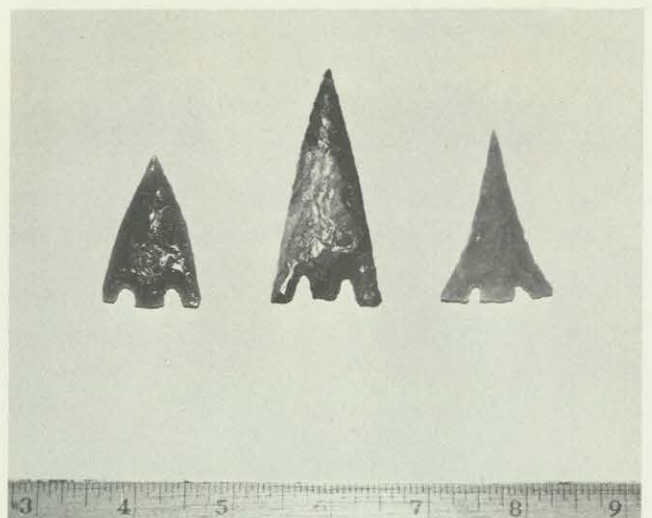
Photos By Wallace Hughes

In display top photo, center point is a Lafayette, the others are Bolen and Archaic points. These were found in fields in Columbia, Hamilton and Gilchrist counties. Surface hunting is the easiest and frequently the most productive method of finding artifacts. Eroded areas such as one shown above, may also produce some relics.



A small hand cultivator was used to scratch into water-washed bank at ancient village site. The method involves more work but is sometimes worth the effort when surface hunting is played out. Stone axes, like the one in photo above right, are rare in Florida. This one was turned up at a building site east of Lake City. The two drills and the knife blade are surface finds from Suwannee County. The Hernando points, right, were excavated from Columbia County site. They date from around 400 B.C. to 400 A.D.

By VINARD HITT



Photos By Laurence Rossignol

by the early Paleo-Indians to those in use when the Spanish explorers arrived in Florida.

Sites where artifacts may be found are consistently located on high ground adjacent to a body of water. Any farming or land clearing operation in the vicinity of a lake or stream and on elevated terrain is an ideal place to walk and look.

Scuba diving in the rivers is another method by which artifacts are frequently found. North Florida rivers such as the Suwannee, Aucilla, Santa Fe, Steinhatchee, Withlacoochee, Wacasassa, Econfinia, and Chipola have yielded tremendous numbers of artifacts. The best conditions for diving usually occur during the fall and winter months when

the rivers are low and clear. Dark water diving can also be productive, but it can be extremely dangerous. Therefore, when diving the turbid waters of spring and summer, a bright, dependable light is a necessity.

Searching for artifacts is a most enjoyable way to spend an afternoon. If one takes the time to learn how and where to look, he will be pleasantly surprised at the ease with which they may be found.

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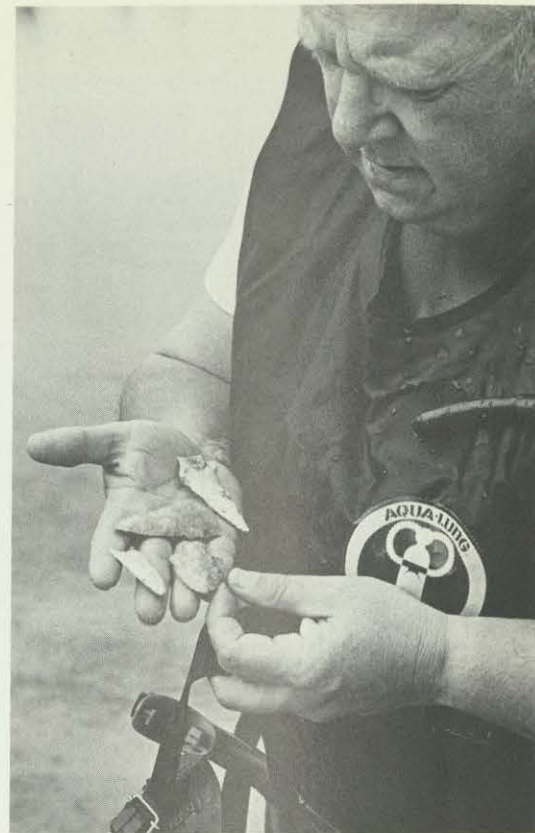
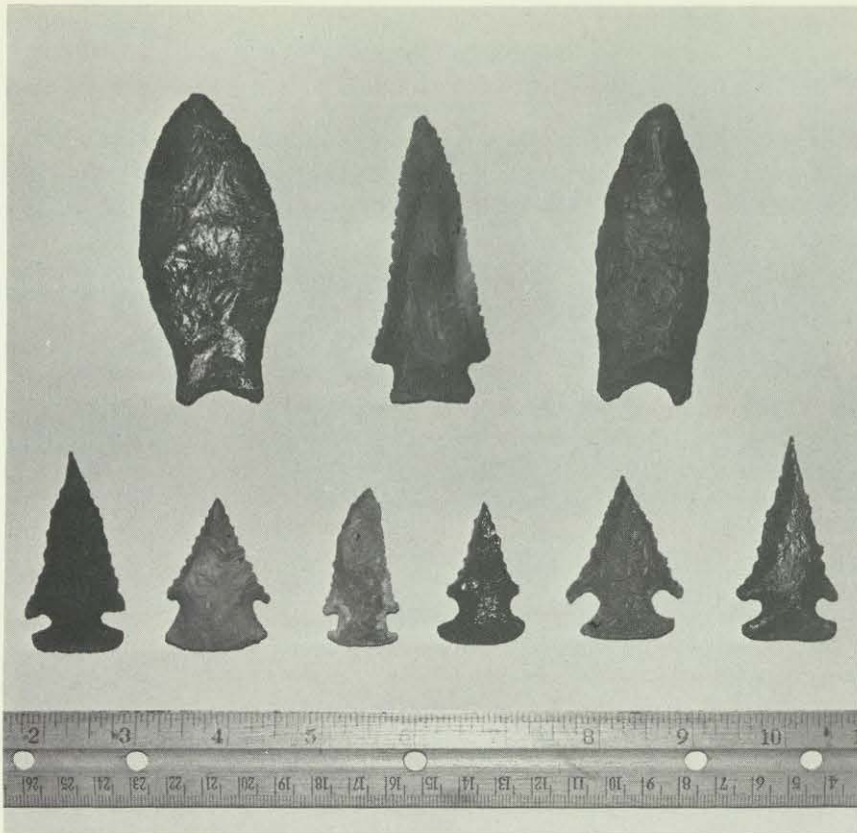


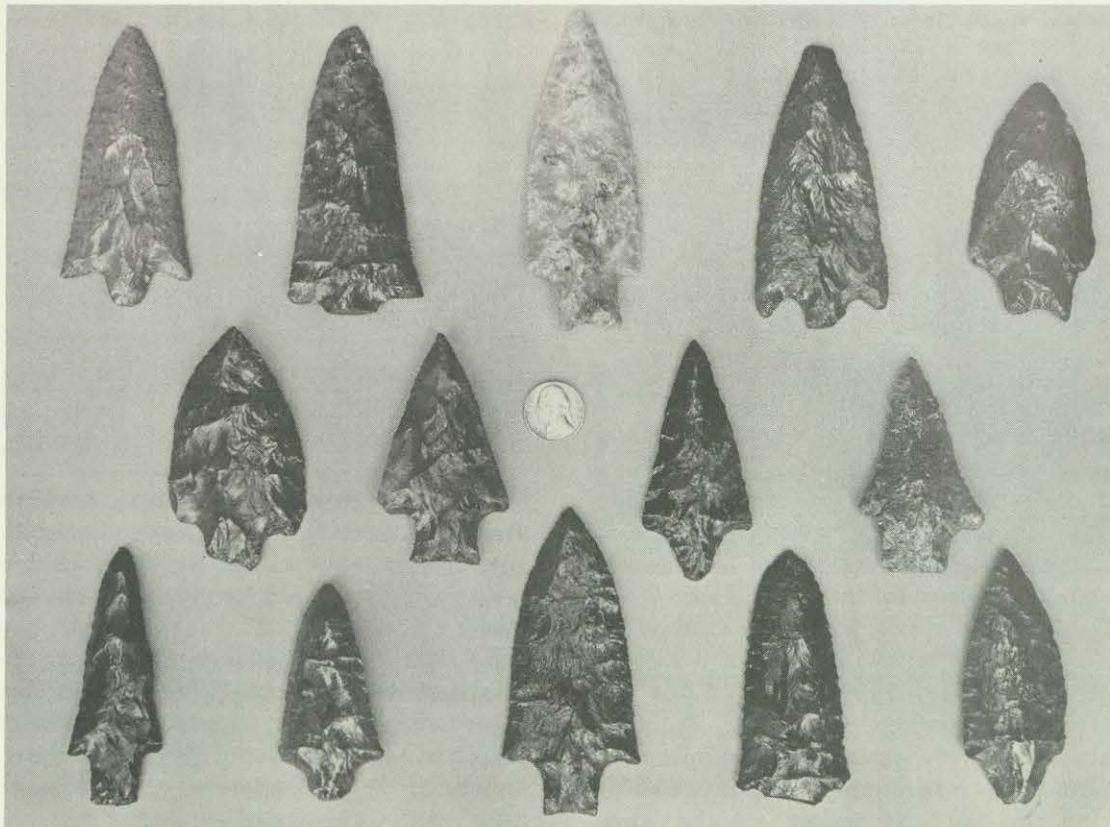
Photo By Wallace Hughes

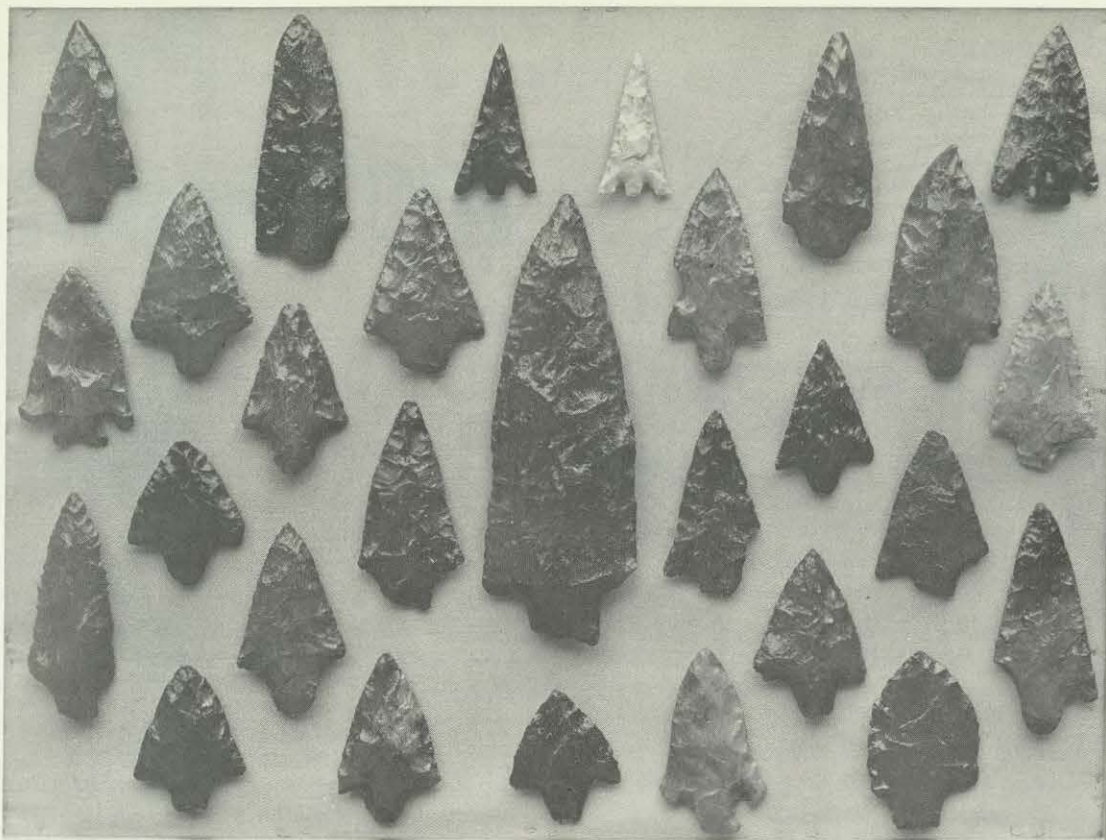
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Scuba diving produces some very fine points; the bottom row in photo at left above consists of beveled Bolens, the top center piece is a Kirk Serrated point, and the other two are Paleo points. They were found in the riv-

ers of north Florida. Bolens date from 7,500-5,000 B.C., and the two Paleo points date from 10,000-8,500 B.C. A large unbroken point is more commonly found by a diver than by surface hunter. The smallest of the points in the collection seen below is about 4½ inches in length.

Photos By Laurence Rossignol





Photos By Laurence Rossignol

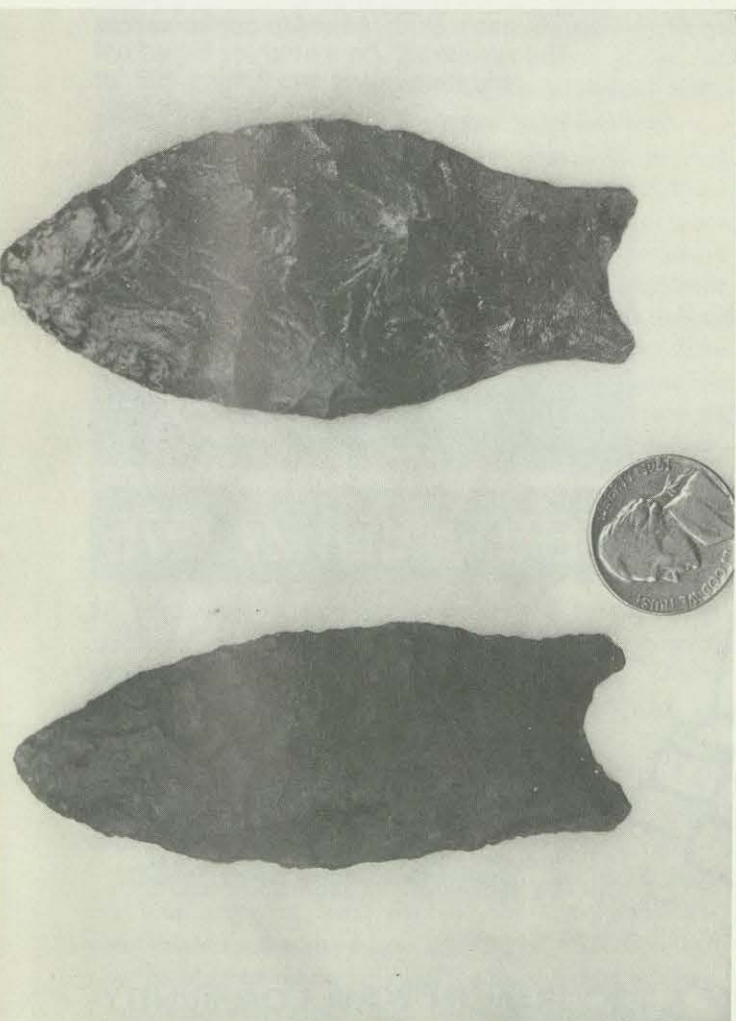


Photo By Jim Barkuloo

Divers discover variety of points representing the range of types and ages. The unusually large point in the center of the display seen above measures 6¾ inches. The lot was gathered from Santa Fe River. Paleo points, left, were produced from 10,000 to 12,000 years ago, according to the current methods of dating. Scuba gear has added a new dimension to relic hunting in that it requires practiced eyes to be able to pick goodies from bottom debris.

Put an Indoorsman in your shoes



For purposes of this message, an indoorsman is anyone who is not an outdoorsman—not a hunter or fisherman, for example. There are about 55 million outdoorsmen in the United States—but there are over 150 million indoorsmen. By sponsoring National Hunting and Fishing Day programs on September 27—and by making sure that there will be plenty of indoorsmen on hand to take part—you can make major strides in giving these people a better understanding of the sportsmen's involvement in conservation. The results will be a brighter future not only for hunting and fishing, but for conservation as well.

**National
Hunting & Fishing
Day**

SEPTEMBER 27, 1975

The three prior observances of National Hunting and Fishing Day have been highly successful thanks to the strong grassroots support that has been provided by the nation's sportsmen's clubs and conservation groups. This year's observance will be successful for the same reason.

YOU CAN HELP! BECOME INVOLVED IN A PROGRAM IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Refined Methods

the details of fishing—gear and technique—are constantly being honed by anglers on the trail of the unattainable ultimate



By CHARLES WATERMAN

A PROFESSIONAL FISHING EXPERT conducting a seminar said a while back that fishing is just as good in the St. Johns River as it was 17 years ago. Undoubtedly he is right if you use the methods he is so proficient in.

Unless he had some electrofishing equipment and actually counted the fish in a given stretch (unlike that far back) or had used exactly the same methods he used then, there is no way for the average angler to compare fishing of today with that of a couple of decades ago. Sport fishing methods have progressed so far that they can produce as large a catch as those of 20 years ago, even when there are fewer fish to work on.

It was a little less than 20 years ago that the plastic worm and its buddies began to appear on the scene, but the methods used then were crude compared to those of the present. In those days, the bass along the shoreline or other cover, or those that actually broke water offshore, were about the only ones we bothered with anyway.

My point is that the details of bass fishing—and some other kinds of angling—are being refined constantly. For example, the fishermen who were making fun of light gear for bass only a few years back are now going to very delicate equipment when conditions demand. You could say that things have come full circle but that's not true. The current methods are better. The study of gamefish today is very different from the casual observations we used to make and record as dramatic discoveries.

In some fields, good fishermen are now willing to use methods they didn't care for a couple of generations back. In studying some magazines printed 50 years ago, I find more reference to "sporting methods" than I do today. There were successful fishermen who used only fly tackle for bass; others who wouldn't use anything except something on the surface. And there were some who felt casting to open water was actually unsportsmanlike. You had to have something definite to throw at, they said.

Most of these self-imposed handicaps (and they are handicaps, at least part of the time) will get you snickers today. I am convinced that fish are now harder to catch in most heavily-fished waters. I am also convinced that there is actually more

emphasis on the number and size of fish caught today than there was when I was a kid.

No argument with this, but it does make it difficult to measure the *quality* of today's fishing against that of 50 years ago.

Open water fishing for bass was a hard pill for fishermen to swallow. When it was "structure" fishing or grass fishing where the grass didn't show, they could accept it better than fishing on a clean sand bottom, for example. But many Florida lakes have smooth sand bottoms, being shaped like a soup plate, and when there's nothing along the shore, you have to fish over a clean bottom.

I was forced into it the other evening when I had combed a shoreline fruitlessly and then saw a few strikes some distance out over a bottom that I knew was almost smooth enough to roller-skate on. All of the strikes were about the same distance from shore, indicating a definite choice of depth for the baitfish—and the bass. So I started throwing my lure to that distance from shore and had some action. I admit it was less exciting than fishing to *something* whether I could see it or not.

Being a little daffy on the snook subject, I was momentarily excited the other night to hear the booming strikes of heavy fish in the middle of a small back-country river. I'd fished heavy cover all day for smaller fish and my hands were a little shaky as I tied on a lure to throw out into the blackness. The first strike was not long in coming, but the fish got away and I then hooked and landed one—bigger than anything I'd seen all day. But just flapping it out there into the open was less exciting. I quit with the fish still blasting.

BOYD PFEIFFER, of the *Washington Post* and *Sports Afield*, stuck his neck out and wrote a complete book on *Shad Fishing* (Crown Publishers, \$8.95). Since ignorance hangs like a morning fog over most Florida shad anglers, it's a very worthy purchase for anyone who wants to know a little more about a fish that's been underrated and often ignored in the South. Pfeiffer is especially good on the more sporting methods of catching the fish.

I sure hope the book sells. Too often such specialized subjects are passed up in favor of proven sellers about the same old subjects that, of necessity, are repetitious.

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For one thing, Pfeiffer stresses the casting procedures of working the "poor man's salmon," something neglected by many who insist on trolling. He also brings us up to date on the shad life cycle, including its route through the oceans between the time it goes to sea and when it comes back to spawn. Although that's been no secret to students of the fish in recent years, most fishermen just don't know about it. Apparently the ocean routes are pretty well established.

And he says that the reason our southern shad spawn only once and then die is the higher rate of metabolism in southern waters. More northerly fish spawn more than once and run to larger size.

Then he has an excellent section on shad cookery. Many shad are wasted by people who don't know how to get out the bones. Some years back I had an intelligent request for shad boning methods and couldn't answer, even though I queried everyone I could buttonhole on the subject. I'm not keeping that business a secret, but you'd have to scan a couple of pages of Pfeiffer's illustrations to understand it. Me too.

I HAD A CALL THE OTHER DAY from a new fisherman in the Florida Keys. It seems he had discovered a flat where both tarpon and bonefish were plentiful, coming past him in schools and unwilling to strike. How should he fish for them?

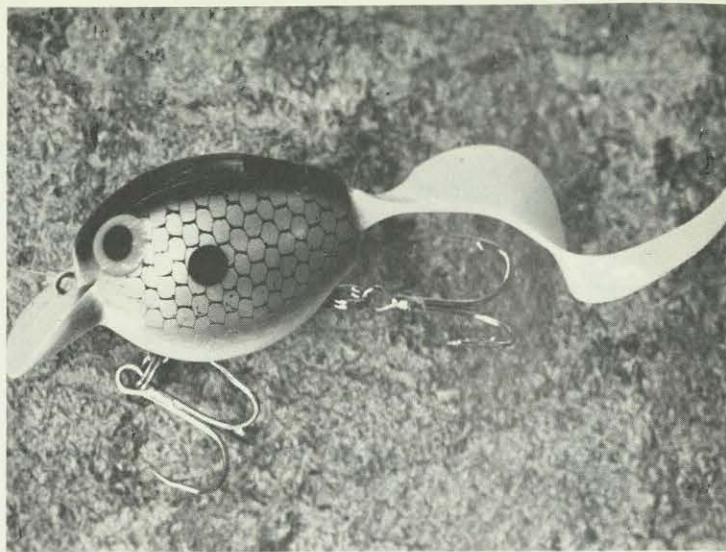
I wish I knew. This is an example of fish that are traveling from one area to another and probably aren't stopping to feed in his section. Both tarpon and bonefish can be caught out of schools when they aren't in a hurry, but they're hard to stop when their minds are on something else.

The best bet is to cast far ahead of the first fish and work the bait very slowly. I have seen a single fish peel off and take a lure when the others seemed to pay no attention at all. In very shallow water, such fish are both spookier and more attentive.

When an entire school of bonefish swims right past my artificial without paying attention to it, I often wonder if they've sighted it at all. When they're going pretty fast, I suspect they're watching farther ahead than when loafing and feeding.

I have seen this work and it's worth a try: Move the lure quite fast to get a bonefish's attention, and then let it sink toward the bottom and work it in the normal way. As I say, I've seen it work beautifully—and I've seen it fail miserably—but you have to make calls if you want to get results.

BASS LURES ARE TRADITIONALLY BUILT UP by addition. The first spoon was soon embellished by some feathers and hair, later by a strip of porkrind in addition to that. Some rather simple plugs have acquired spinners fore and aft in their later edi-



The "Li'l Tubby" lure, above, is a combination of a wiggly plastic tail with a conventional "fat plug."

tions, have been decorated by shiny beads up front, and have received all sorts of tails.

It's natural that the "fat plug" types, originally intended to be rather close imitations of shad, would get some trimmings. One of them, the "Li'l Tubby" from Tubby Tackle, Inc., Norman, Oklahoma, starts out with the lipped, fat-plug design but has a rattler inside. Then it has a plastic tail of the kinky, twisty type that came along with the plastic worms. The addition of the plastic tail gets it out of the shad silhouette form, but like many other bass baits it carries some of the characteristics of other things that bass eat or strike.

The tails are pretty skinny for the purpose of extra wiggle, so they aren't going to last forever. You can buy replacements which are attached with an ingenious knob that fits into a body chamber. If you don't want to use the tail you can just go with the fast-wriggling and rattling little imitation shad or whatever. For that matter, living baitfish don't rattle much, but a bit of clatter has been recognized as added attraction. It's worth mentioning because it's a greatly modified specimen of the fairly new lures that began with the "Big O."

WHEN A RIVER GOES DEAD because of low water, the fishing tends to falter. Such streams often acquire an overdose of algae and get the description "stagnant." I've never understood just how gamefish could continue to live in such waters, appear to be healthy, and still be so hard to catch. When the water begins to move again, fishing will snap back to normal in most cases, barring an extreme that can actually kill them or stop their reproduction.

There are exceptions, and I recall a boyhood triumph that went against the rules. I went fly

fishing on a midwestern creek with a pair of veterans who really knew their way around. I'd never been at the creek before, and as soon as we stopped the car I grabbed my rod and went sloshing off with youthful enthusiasm. I hadn't gone far before I caught a nice bass, and I had a little more bass action plus a big string of panfish by nightfall. "Great creek," I thought.

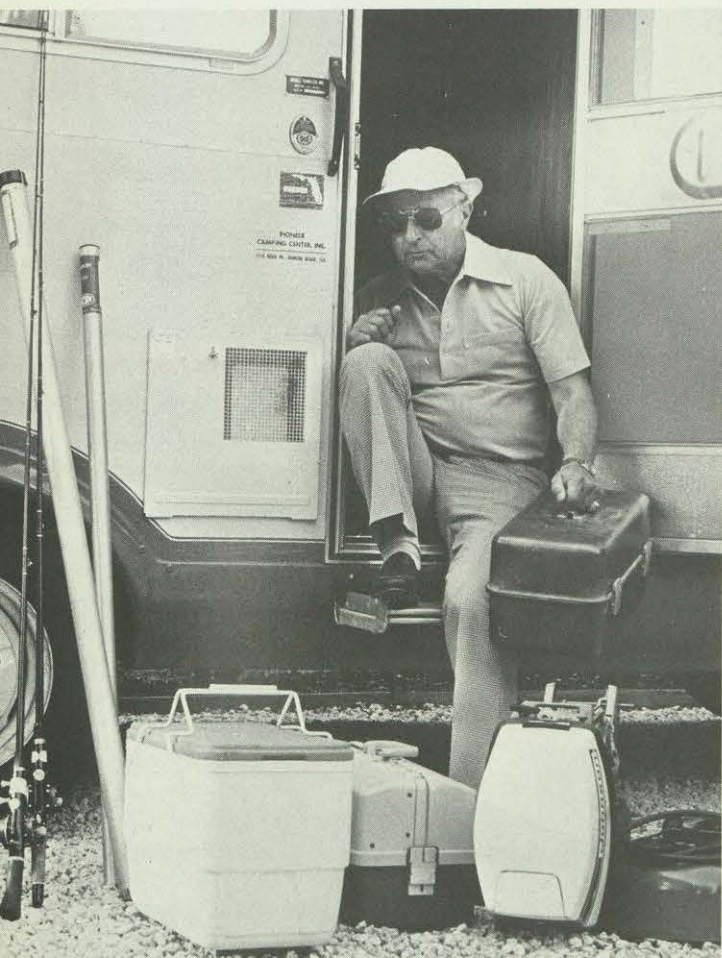
When I went back to the car I found the rather annoyed experts stretched out and waiting. They hadn't caught anything. The creek had gotten too low to fish, they said.

But it was not the kind of stream that required current to be good fishing. It had remained fairly clear (without an excessive "bloom") and it was truly a wet-weather stream. Those fish had spent much of their lives in the little ponds left when the current stopped.

Similar things have happened in Florida waters at times, although it seems to be in the smaller creeks and the canals for the most part. In cases where the fish become overcrowded, of course, they get into poor condition pretty quickly.

WE'VE TRAVELED CONSIDERABLY in small van campers. Our latest is self-contained and gives an appear-

The van motorhome has plenty of room for living, but no place for all the surplus gear a fisherman takes along.



ance of vast living quarters on the interior. Living, yes. Storage, no.

When we tow a boat, which is most of the time, there's room for any fishing gear we could possibly need. Without the boat, a small motor for use on rental boats, a gasoline tank, and fishing gear make things pretty crowded at night. If an inflatable boat is carried inside, you'd have to sleep standing up or in the front seats.

So I'm having a big box built on the order of the "dock box" used by large fishing boats. This one will be small enough to go through the camper door and can be locked and left outside at night. It will hold a couple of big tackle boxes, the aforementioned motor and gasoline tank, and some smaller gadgets, although I'm thinking of rigging a way to fasten the smelly gas tank on one of the bumpers during travel.

When we pull the boat the big box will ride there, and it can be chained to either boat or camper if we mistrust our current neighborhood.

We used a somewhat different system on trips to Alaska and British Columbia some years back. We had lots of rain, and although everything could be fitted into our little van rig when it was dry, we found that a couple of days of damp clothing and the ever-wet waders made things a mite unpleasant at dinnertime or bedtime. So we carried a small Thermos pop tent and set it up for storage when we were stopped for a considerable period. It was wonderful.

MARCO ISLAND, the former snook paradise—many of them are still around there—has been heavily developed by the Deltona Corporation. Some time back they established an excellent ecology lab aimed at making the most of the mangrove swamp destruction that dredging and filling had brought about.

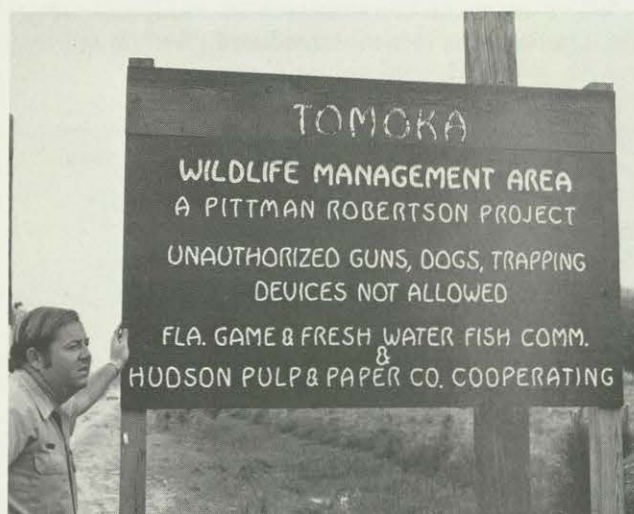
I wrote in *Florida Wildlife* how good the ecology lab was and what a worthy project I felt it was. This brought some acid disapproval from readers who felt I was condoning destruction of the all-important mangrove estuaries. I did my best to explain that I didn't feel that way at all but that any effort at repairing the damage was commendable.

Now the developers are requesting permission from the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers to pump and fill another large section for homes. I understand the nonexistent lots have already been sold. That project had been halted by a stop order some time back. I hope the mangrove destruction planned by the new communities can be avoided and that the new population can be settled inland.

The time has come when we must forgo the status of waterfront homes and the boat canals that open the ocean to those who can afford them. We must learn to live inland or our precious coastal areas will disappear. ●



Tomoka Wildlife Management Area



Photos By Jim Reed

THE TOMOKA WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA came into being in 1952 with the execution of a five-year agreement between the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission and two large landowners, Hudson Pulp and Paper Company, owner of 21,299 acres, and Tomoka Land Company, owner of 28,771 acres.

The lands were located in Volusia County north of U.S. Highway 92 between Deland and Daytona Beach and north to the Barberville Road.

Local sportsmen's groups, particularly the Volusia County Wildlife Association, retired wildlife officer Hodgie Lungren, and Fred Stanberry, now chief of the Wildlife Management Division for the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, along with the Volusia County Board of County Commissioners, were instrumental in establishing the tract as a management area.

From the very beginning, the Tomoka Area drew support from the Volusia County citizenry. Richard Harlow, formerly a wildlife biologist for the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, was the first project leader on the Tomoka Area. He wrote a report on the area in 1956 and stated:

Local assistance in the development of the Tomoka Area has been of considerable scope. For better accessibility to the area the Volusia County Commissioners have built two bridges, one across the Little Tomoka River and one across the Big Tomoka River. They have had culverts placed at the Gator Head crossing and have donated large cement culverts to the area to prevent the banks of the drainage canal from washing away. The Vo-Ag students of DeLand High School, under the guidance of Instructor Larry Fagan, have erected a

number of hog-proof turkey feeders. Assistance in the development of food plots has been given by the Halifax Junior Conservation Club. The Ormond and Halifax Rod and Gun Clubs have donated funds for use in food plot development. The local Soil Conservation Service, managed by Work Unit Conservationist Clarke Dolive, has given valuable information on planting procedures and agronomic treatment of wildlife food plots, as well as seed to plant for turkey and deer. Ted Strawn, member of the Volusia Wildlife Association, donated enough hog-proof wire to fence three two-acre plots. These and other activities by local groups have helped to make the area a community project.

Since 1952, the area grew in size to approximately 120,000 acres, including a portion in Flagler County, and then decreased to 100,000 acres. Approximately 4,500 acres were set aside for a

still hunt area with the remainder of the area open to the use of dogs. Interstate Highway 4 cut the still hunt area into small pieces, and access was so limited that the area was abandoned. Later, a portion of the Tomoka Area between S.R. 40 and the Flagler County line was removed from the contract. Now, the portion of the management area in Flagler County known as the Relay Tract does not join the rest of the area. Actually, it has different regulations, and there is some speculation that the Relay Tract should become a separate management area.

The present landowners in the Tomoka WMA are Hudson Pulp and Paper Company (47,709 acres), Tomoka Land Company (32,000 acres), Rotaler Corporation (16,300 acres), Dr. E. C. Lunsford (2,600 acres), and Roland Granat and S. H. Kramer, trustees for another owner (3,000 acres).

About 47% of the area is made up of slash pine,
(Continued on next page)

Photo By Jim Reed

Hunters using that portion of the area north of Highway 92 may enter and leave the management area only at designated check stations, one of which is shown in photo at left. The white-tailed deer comes in for the largest share of attention, although other game is also available. Open "prairie" type habitat on area is seen right.

Photo By Wallace Hughes



By JIM REED

This is No. 15 in a series of articles on Florida wildlife management areas. Current maps and regulations on individual areas will be available in October from Commission regional offices and the Tallahassee office (see page 1), and from each area's hunt headquarters during the fall hunting season.

(Continued from preceding page)

planted pine sites, saw palmetto, gallberry, and wiregrass. About 48% of the management area is pond cypress, black gum, fetterbrush, wax myrtle, and greenbriar. The balance of the terrain consists of sand pine, scrub oak ridges, cabbage palmetto, magnolia hammocks, and open prairies.

The Tomoka River twists and turns through eight miles of the area on the east side. Two small lakes, Indian Pond (67 acres), and Scroggin Pond (46 acres), are also found on the area. Fishing is allowed during the hunting season, by permit from the landowner. Vandalism and litter caused the landowners to close portions of the area to public access except during the open hunting season.

The white-tailed deer is the most sought-after game animal, but turkey, squirrel, quail, mourning dove, and wood duck are also taken. A few bear exist and were legal game for a few years although few were killed.

Then special bear hunts were held for the ardent bear hunter but their success was nil. When it was realized bear were becoming scarce in the area due to causes other than the hunter's gun, several "run but no-kill" hunts were held, but bear hunting was finally prohibited entirely.

The turkey population has followed a pattern of ups and downs the past few years, and turkey hunting has been limited to the spring gobbler season on the Relay Tract.

Small game harvest is incidental to the overall hunt.

Game management practices carried on by the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission include planting food plots, taking game inventory, controlled burning, posting, boundary maintenance, operation and observation of quail and turkey feeders, restocking, and strict law enforcement.

Restocking efforts have centered around wild turkey. The area is generally excellent turkey habitat and can support many more birds than presently exist.

Land use practices carried on by the landowner include timber harvest, pine planting, controlled burning, and cattle and hog grazing. All of these benefit the animals in some way.

Approximately 100 miles of graded roads have been constructed through the area, and another 100 miles of woods roads provide access for the hunter. The graded roads can be traveled in conventional two-wheel drive vehicles unless the area is extremely wet. The woods roads require four-wheel drive vehicles most of the time. The roads are maintained by the landowners, except for the federal, state, and county roads that traverse the area.

The first year the Tomoka Wildlife Management Area was open to the public, the season lasted 18 hunting days, and 25 legal deer and nine turkeys were harvested. As the area increased in size, the hunting season was extended, and hunter pressure increased. Last season, an estimated 146 deer and 15 turkey gobblers were harvested.

The deer harvest has leveled off to around 125

A welcome sign asks hunters to respect the rights of the private landowners who make access possible through their public spirited cooperation with the Game & Fresh Water Fish Commission. Many individuals and local organizations cooperated to make the area a good place to hunt. A lot of effort has been exerted to improve the population of turkeys here. Variety of habitat types exist on Tomoka area. Shown above is hardwood hammock bordered by an open prairie.

Photo By Jim Reed





Photo By Jim Reed



Photo By Lovett Williams

to 150 legal bucks per year. While the heavy pressure has made hunting a little unpleasant for the hunter, game populations have held their own or increased, except for turkeys, which now appear to be increasing again.

Some of the management programs have been discontinued, because of the costs and because better techniques of land management have been developed. Timber cutting and controlled burning by the landowners, cattle grazing by the livestock interests, and spring and fall food plot planting by

the Commission are the primary game management projects used at the present time.

Deer harvested on the Tomoka Area average about the same weight as they do on the Ocala and Farmton Areas. The average adult buck weighs around 125 pounds (live weight) on these areas. As on any area, some deer will get to be much heavier than average and some will be smaller.

The estimated deer and turkey harvest the first four years the area was open was:

Year	Deer Harvest	Turkey Harvest
1952-53	29	9
1953-54	22	18
1954-55	14	31
1955-56	32	20

The harvest for the past four years was:

Year	Deer Harvest	Turkey Harvest
1971-72	167	53
1972-73	257	47
1973-74	133	33
1974-75	146	15

The figures shown on these tables were taken from check station reports and estimates from personnel who worked the area and not from the mail survey that follows each hunting season. Harvests may vary yearly due to weather conditions, hunter pressure, animal populations, and hunting regulations.

The Tomoka Area has had excessive hunting pressure for the past two seasons, but the new quota system will control the number of hunters on all wildlife management areas during the first nine days of the 1975-76 season, and bring about a higher quality hunt without cutting anyone out of his hunting privilege. ●



always ready for a handout is
this winter resident

The Ring-billed Gull

By DAVE NORRIS

I STILL LAUGH WHEN I THINK OF THE FIRST TIME my wife, Alice, encountered a flock of hungry ring-billed gulls. And although she laughs about it now too, she didn't think it was very funny at the time.

The incident took place a few years ago during a family picnic on a beautiful, sparkling-white beach a few miles south of downtown Clearwater on the Gulf coast. It all started casually enough as Alice walked along barefoot in the surf rather absent-mindedly enjoying a large hamburger as the cool waves slid in and out beneath her feet.

But this peaceful scene was to be short-lived, for other eyes had seen her sandwich.

Almost before she realized it, my wife found herself surrounded by a dozen or more squawking, feathered freeloaders. Startled, she waved her sandwich at the hungry birds and shouted to scare them away.

But the sight of that huge hamburger waving back and forth in front of them was more than the hungry ringbills could stand, and they immediately escalated their efforts, flying in closer and closer. And, of course, the closer they came, the more frantically Alice waved her hamburger and shouted—perfectly sure in her own mind that the noisy gulls were after her personally.

In desperation, Alice turned and ran. But the

gulls swarmed after her in noisy pursuit, forcing her to use the only weapon at hand, her hamburger. She turned and hurled the sandwich with all her might at the squawking horde of feathered fiends. Abruptly, the ringbills broke off the chase and began to squabble over the distribution of their hard-won prize, and my wife made good her "narrow escape."

Probably no other bird more eagerly accepts a handout than the almost-always-hungry ring-billed gull. Soaring, dipping, and finally fluttering anxiously just overhead, these noisy, competitive birds quickly respond to almost anything edible you might—or might not—want to toss into the air to them.

About 20 inches in length with a 4-foot wingspread, the ringbill is relatively easy to identify even though its plumage—gray mantle, black wingtips, and snow-white head and underparts—closely resembles that of other gulls, particularly the herring gull. Unlike its larger cousin, however, the ringbill has *yellowish-green* legs and a prominent black band encircling its bill near the tip. The bill ring is its best fieldmark and also gives the bird its name.

Like most gulls, ringbills are usually found close to water. And, generally speaking, their habits are compatible with man's broad interests. Particularly

their eating habits. About one-half the ringbill's menu consists of large insects like grasshoppers and cockroaches. The balance of their diet is made up of small fish (alive or dead) which they snatch from the water's surface with varying degrees of dexterity. On shore, ringbills eagerly run down careless crabs and small rodents as opportunity dictates.

And for dessert, wherever man is present, there is usually a wide variety of garbage available. The optimistic ringbill, in addition to being adept at soliciting a handout, is also an accomplished scavenger often seen following garbage trucks, raiding dumps, or trailing ships in the hope that the cook or a careless passenger will toss some sort of snack overboard.

Ring-billed gulls breed mainly on isolated beaches and wilderness islands in southern Canada, from Great Slave Lake and Hudson Bay south into the northern United States. Noisily gathering in large colonies that often number into the thousands, they construct relatively simple nests 10 to 16 inches in diameter, using dried grasses, weeds, and sometimes small sticks, which they then line with finer grasses and occasionally feathers. Most of the nests are built directly on the ground along the upper edges of the beach and among rocks and boulders. Occasionally a few nests may be found in the low-hanging branches of trees when more desirable sites are unavailable.

There is only one brood a year, consisting of three or four chicks. The dull-white, brown-splotted eggs are incubated in turn by both parents for three weeks. And after the precocious, down-covered youngsters hatch, both parents continue to tend them and protect them.

But raising a brood of young gulls is no easy job. Soon after hatching, the light-colored, brown-splotted or smoky-gray chicks scurry out of the nest and wander freely around the colony on foot. Somehow, however, despite all of the helter-skelter and confusion, the parents are able to locate and recognize their own offspring and keep the little powder puffs filled up with fish. Although the chicks will beg food from any adult they might encounter, parents will only feed their own chicks, and the youngsters are totally dependent upon being fed by the customary regurgitation process.

At one time, the ring-billed gull was considered to be the most widely distributed and the most easily seen of all North American gulls. But not today. Many observers feel that their numbers have been greatly reduced in recent years due to man's development of many of the ringbill's former

breeding areas. Strangely enough, while the extroverted ringbill displays little fear of man during the greater part of the year, it becomes very sensitive to even the slightest disturbance during the springtime breeding season.

Consequently, as people have moved farther and farther into formerly wild areas, many of the ringbill's traditional nesting sites have been abandoned by the birds, even though suitable alternative sites have not been found. With fewer and fewer gulls breeding, the ringbill—although still found over much of its former range—has become much less common.

Ringbills winter from British Columbia, Montana, Colorado, the Great Lakes region, and Massachusetts south to Florida, Cuba, and southern Mexico.

First-year ringbills are easily identified by their white and brown-flecked plumage and their dark wingtips and tail feathers. Second-year birds are very similar to the adults (three years old and older), except that they still retain dark-tipped tail feathers which form a pronounced band.

In the Sunshine State, the ringbill is a common winter resident from early October until late May. Widespread throughout the northern half of the state, flocks of ringbills can also be found almost anywhere along both coasts. They are regarded as common winter visitors in Everglades National Park, and in recent years they have been seen with increasing frequency in the Keys.

And, as might be suspected, the ring-billed gulls have discovered—and diligently patrol—the numerous fish camps which dot the shores of Lake Okeechobee. They can also be seen sitting solemnly on pilings, piers, and out-buildings, facing into the wind on gusty winter days or serenely napping on the mirrorlike waters of calmer days on Lake Jackson in Sebring and on many other quiet lakes in the central Florida highlands.

But wherever you encounter the perky ring-billed gulls, one thing never changes: they'll always be more than ready for a handout. ●

Photos By Dave Norris



Resembling a small herring gull, the prominent black band and yellowish-green legs identify adult (three yrs. and up) ring-billed gull. Two-year old has ring bill and a dark tail band.

from wood and paint, a skillful outdoorsman produces works of art

Carver In The Sun

HENRY BREWER OF TALLAHASSEE is a duck hunter. He has lots of company. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that there are more than 2.8 million in the country who share his passion for the pursuit of the web-footed fowl. Florida has its share of the clan—somewhere around 40,000 by Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission calculations.

But Henry goes us run-of-the-mill duck chasers a notch or two better. He not only makes his own big, rugged, no-nonsense "coastal rig" decoys but creates some highly detailed display-only waterfowl carvings that have to be seen to be fully appreciated. Although classified as decoys by contest sponsors, many of these sculptured wooden replicas are true works of art.

Decoy collecting has come into its own during recent years. Some of the old gunning decoys produced by "name" carvers of the past may go for comfortable, and surprising, three-digit prices, and

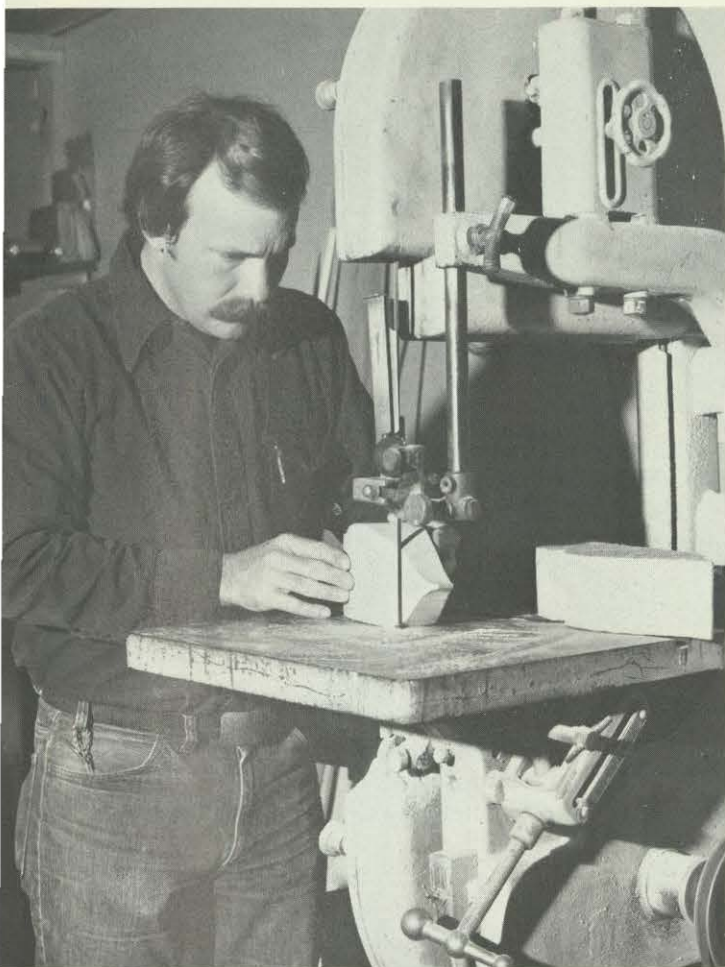
even higher. Prime modern wooden sculptures may equal or exceed some of the old classics in dollar value.

But collectors aside, there are plenty of waterfowl gunners who have a feeling for the aesthetics of their sport. To them, the modern plastic decoys, no matter how artfully contrived, are held in disdain—like something akin to a celluloid bathtub toy.

If your feelings on the matter run in a similar vein, count yourself fortunate if you've inherited or otherwise come by a set of old wooden decoys. It is possible that you might be fortunate enough to find someone who knows what he's doing to make a few for you. Even at that, the current price tag of \$150-\$180 or more for a dozen custom-made hunting decoys is a mite steep for most of us ordinary mud squishers.

But to get back to the beginning, Henry was more or less casual about his waterfowl hunting





at first. He puttered about the creeks and lake-side marshes of his native Tallahassee area, jump shooting whatever fate tossed his direction in the way of waterfowl. Wood ducks and an occasional ringneck made up the usual bag.

Then, in 1962, the widow of a local old time hunter gave Henry a sack of aged wooden decoys. The seed fell on fertile ground. There was something about the battered, paint-worn blocks that stirred vague, pleasant feelings in the young outdoorsman.

Maybe it was a legacy from his grandfather on his mother's side of the family. R. O. Collins, in his earlier days around the turn of the century, had been a market hunter. He plied his trade mostly on Lake Iamonia, northeast of Tallahassee. For the ducks he bagged he found a ready market at the hotels in Thomasville, across the state line in Georgia. By 1910, he'd been able to buy out an iron foundry in Tallahassee, and until 1974 the Collins Foundry occupied a prominent place in the business life of Florida's capital city. But duck hunting remained an interest of the master mechanic and machinist throughout his life.

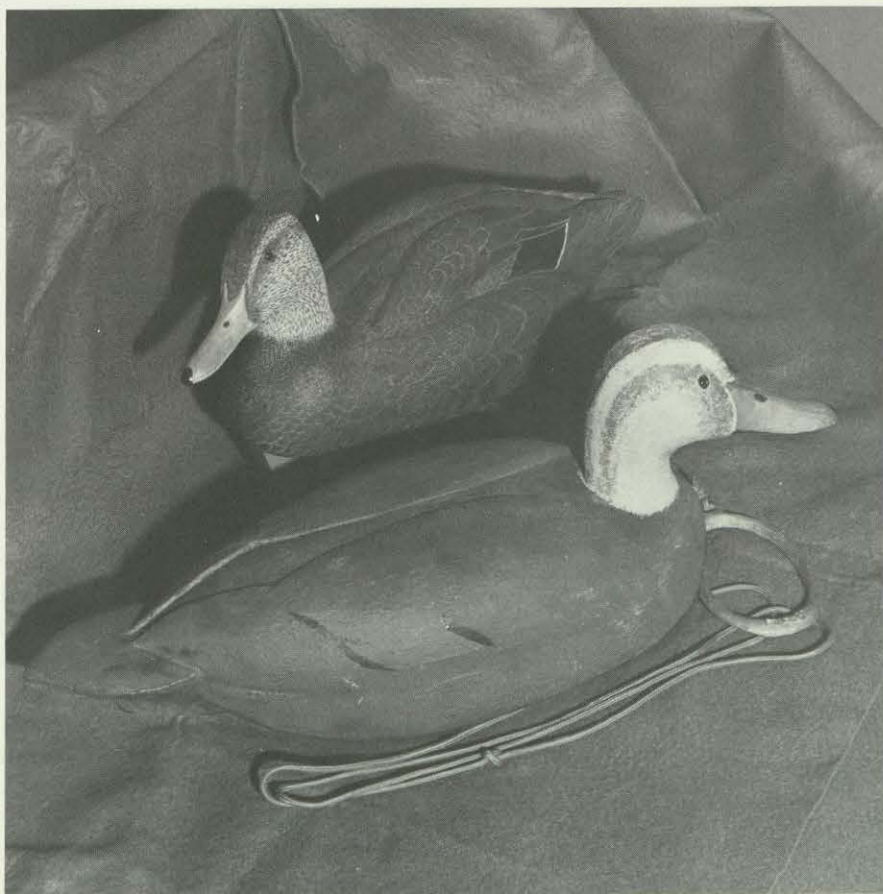
Henry's first step down the decoy crafter's path was painting his newly-acquired wooden birds. Using color plates as a guide, he did what, even in retrospect, was a pretty fair job of interpreting nature. He started shooting ducks over the blocks

(Continued on next page)

By MORRIE NAGGIAR

Using preserved duck skin as his guide, Henry Brewer applies an acrylic paint to his drake pintail carving, left. Initial step in producing decoy is rough shaping form on band saw, above. For show birds, Henry laminates wood sections vertically rather than more common horizontal joining. Black duck decoys, right, contrast the fine, detailed carving and painting of display model at rear with the rugged hunting block built for hard use afield.

Photos By William Greer

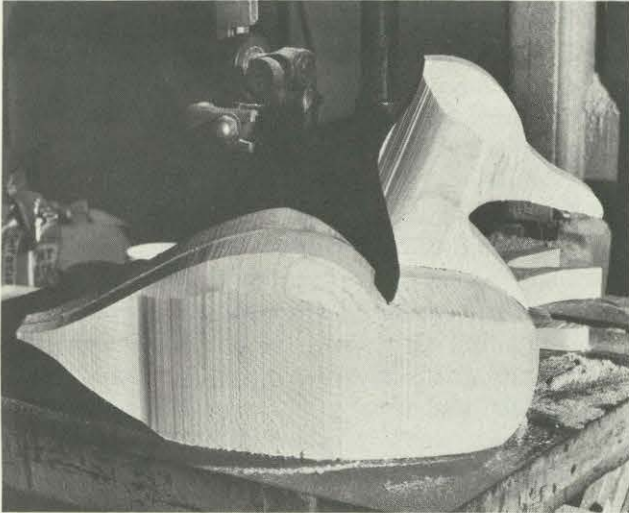
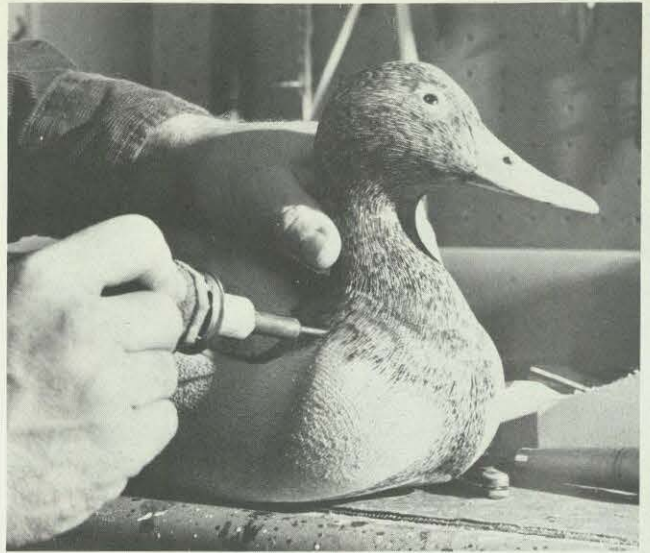


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and found this new phase of waterfowling immensely exciting.

But refurbishing the old decoys set off activities in another direction too. Although fairly well pleased with his initial effort, he felt there wasn't enough detail on his refinished gunning decoys. He decided to hand tailor a decoy that would better fill the requirements of the decorative piece he had in mind.

Using photos and color plates as guides, he carved and painted a wood duck. Entered in the North



Florida Fair in 1969, the woodie took a second place in the miscellaneous art category. After the fair, Henry sold this decoy to a collector who had viewed it at the show. The buyer hinged his purchase on an agreement from Henry that he would also carve a mallard decoy for him.

In 1970, Henry entered a decoy in the sculpture competition at the North Florida Fair and came away with a 3rd place ribbon. During the past two years, he has taken first place in the realistic wood sculpture, professional division, at the show.



Feather texturing of display model is accomplished with the electric wood burning tool seen in top photograph. After painting, textured surface has a lifelike appearance that is a relatively new look in display decoy carving. Roughed-out ring-necked duck, left above, is made in three parts. Henry prefers sugar pine for carving display models, but it is not always readily available. After roughing out decoy, hollowing body, and gluing the three pieces together, the job of final shaping of the decoy begins. Henry works on ring-neck carving with a keen-edged chisel, at left. "Winners" circle, right, boasts the mallard, green-winged teal, ringneck and wood duck decoys which have won much recognition for hunter-artist Henry Brewer.

Photos By William Greer



He made a trip to the World Championship Wildfowl Carving Competition in Salisbury, Maryland, in 1971. Although his mallard drake entry didn't place, the trip was invaluable for the ideas he picked up. In 1972, he went back to the World Championship and rated an honorable mention for his wood duck entry. At the Midwest Decoy competition in Michigan in 1974, he rated an honorable mention for a green-winged teal entered in the service (hunting) decoy category.

The feeling of artistic accomplishment, plus the show awards and a goodly supply of ready and willing cash buyers, offered plenty of incentive to go full bore on this engrossing pursuit.

Although his display carvings have been so well received that he has had a problem in retaining representative pieces of his own work, Henry is still a waterfowl hunter at heart. His own design of gunning blocks are sturdy, "coastal" types made for durability under heavy use. Despite their rather plain appearance when compared with one of his meticulously crafted show decoys, they suffer not a bit in their purpose of drawing birds into range.

These hunting decoys, of hollow construction, feature a wide oval form and flat bottom for stability. He uses mainly white pine for this purpose but has used western cedar, which he considers

not the best, but it does have the advantage of reasonable price and local availability.

Like other hunters, Henry favors mallards and black ducks, but admits to having a special fondness for the fast-flying teal. Ducks of one kind frequently respond well to decoys representing other species. As an additional attraction to passing teal, however, Henry has made up a set of green-wing blocks that are as pleasing to human eyes as they are to the birds they're meant to toll into range.

So attractive are his teal decoys that we prevailed on Henry to allow us to present the pattern for both his drake and hen greenwings to *Florida Wildlife* readers. We are in the process of putting together a piece on this which is planned for the November issue.

Additional details on decoy collecting, background material on early day as well as contemporary carvers, and other matters pertaining to this fascinating field are treated in a quality, limited-edition magazine, *North American Decoys*. It is published quarterly and carries many full-color illustrations. It is practically a must for the serious decoy enthusiast. The current subscription price is \$12 per year. Address is *North American Decoys*, P. O. Box 246, Spanish Fork, Utah 84660. ●

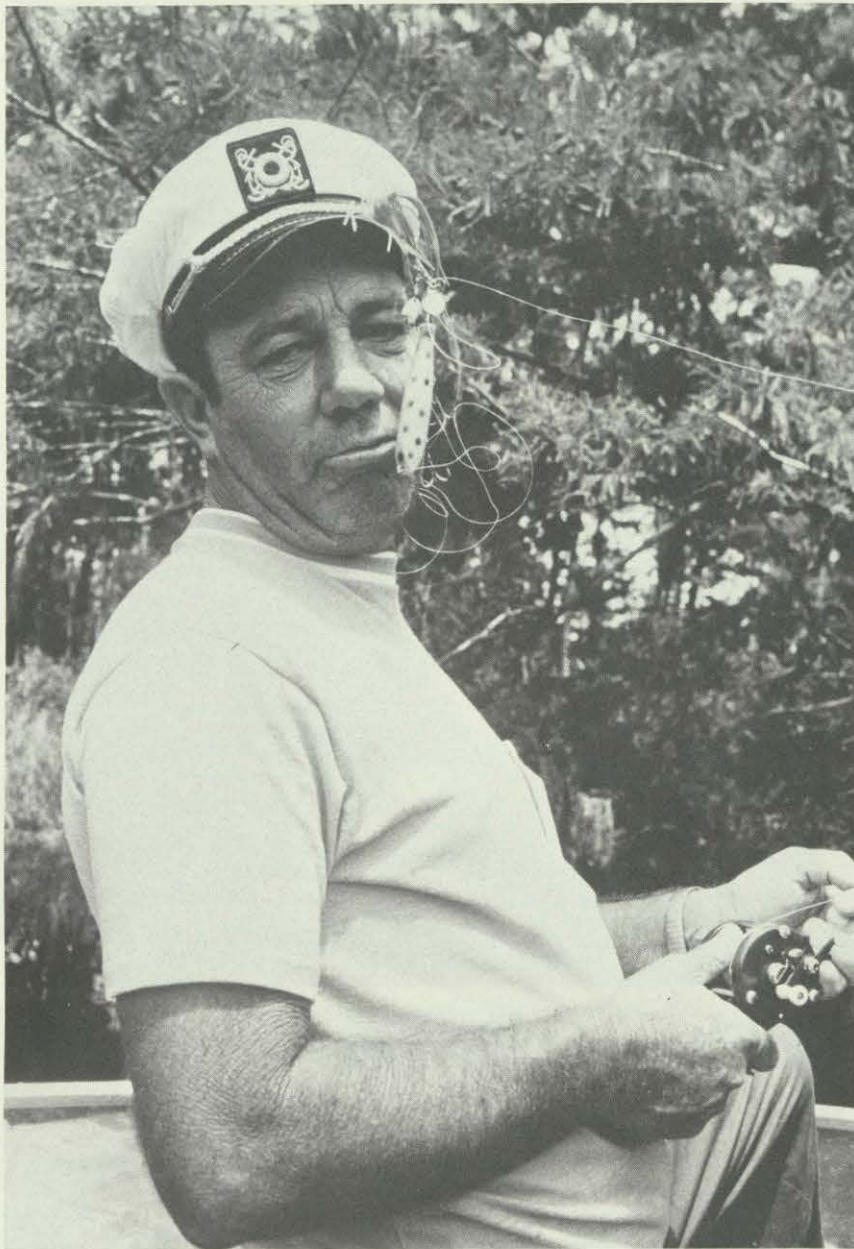


Photo By William Greer

a liberal application of common
sense will head off most
angling accidents

Don't Be A Fishing Casualty

TWO SPORTS FISHERMEN AND THEIR GUIDE, a friend of mine, were deep in the southwest Florida mangrove country. It was a typical snook fishing trip. The linesides were hitting jigs with abandon.

One angler fouled a cast solidly in the mangroves. Without thinking, he jerked once, jerked twice—drawing his spinning line as taut as a violin string. On the third heave, the jig came flying back, hitting their guide in his right eye.

This was the beginning of a harrowing experience. The guide had to bring his party back after the accident. He had no choice, injured or not. His party didn't know the route home in the trackless mangroves. The worst part of the story is that he lost most of the sight in his eye, all because of an accident that shouldn't have happened.

Fishing isn't rated as a highly dangerous sport—unless you persist in falling out of a boat—but it can be unsafe if common sense precautions aren't

followed. Fishing can be dangerous in both fresh and salt water, on land, or in a boat for the unthinking, the careless, or the ignorant angler.

Wildly flying lures are but one of the common dangers for careless fishermen and their companions. The best rule, of course, is don't jerk a fouled lure! Instead, go in and get it. However, sometimes you don't want to waste the time or spoil the fishing hole. Then, if you must jerk it loose, the least you can do is warn your partner, so he can be alert to dodge any projectile lures. It's common to hang lures when casting bush-loaded banks, or over dense grass beds, but the safest procedure is go in after the lure, regardless of whether you spoil the fishing. Jerking, at best, is a poor substitute measure, and a very dangerous one.

Also, there's a right and a wrong way to get your lure out. Don't pull your lure directly in line with your boat. Twitch it, avoiding creating

maximum line tension. No use loading the gun. If you're in the bow or stern, pull the line outside of the boat, and watch what you're doing! If you're the middle man, it's far safer to either go in after the lure or break off and pick it up later. *Think before you yank* is a good motto. Don't be a thoughtless jerk.

No doubt flying lures are dangerous, but they're a minor cause of fishing casualties. Although there're no statistics, undoubtedly the greatest number of injuries are caused by handling fish

caught on artificial lures, particularly plugs with several sets of gang hooks.

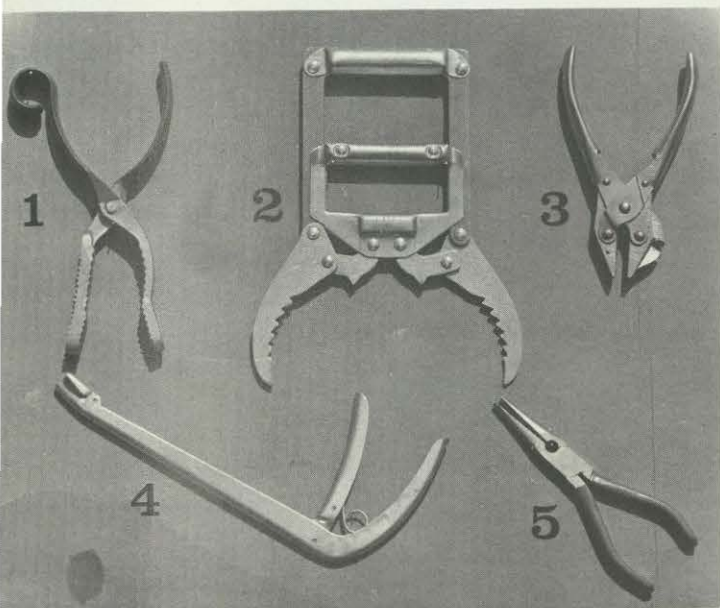
The size of your fish has no relationship to the danger from a plug. Regardless of their size, all fish flounce. A struggling largemouth bass, a twisting chain pickerel, a brawling bowfin, or a savage gar—they're all potentially dangerous with their frantic flailings, and in some cases because of their teeth. But if there's a free gang hook, really watch out! Fortunately, freshwater fish usually aren't as violent as their saltwater brethren, nor do they get as large. Nevertheless, any fish should be handled carefully.

If you've ever had to cut a hook out of a fishing partner, this warning is obvious. Be smart, don't wait until you've had to perform some rough surgery or had it performed on you. It's not a pleasant scene. Ask my wife, Kit. She knows. Despite my preaching that she should handle all fish carefully, she made one mistake with a baby tarpon.

We were fishing in a nameless mangrove creek near Everglades. The baby tarpon were hitting left and right. Kit boated one, maybe a three-pounder—small for a tarpon but having all the fighting spirit of his bigger brothers.

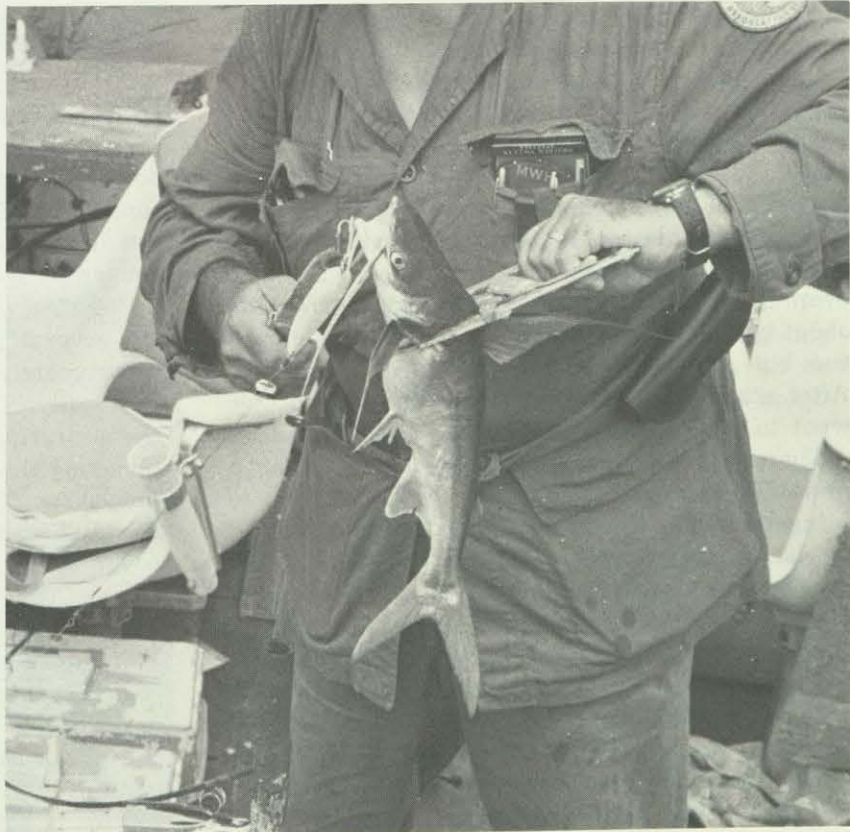
Relaxing her caution, although this was piscatorial dynamite, she placed the pint-sized silver king on the ice box top and began freeing the 3-gang hook plug with a pair of long-nosed pliers.

(Continued on next page)



Careless casting is a major source of fishing casualties, as shown by angler in photo on opposite page. Handy tools, above, for handling chore of safely unhooking fish are: (1) aluminum fish gripper, (2) Han-D-Gaff, (3) Sportmate cutting pliers, (4) pistol grip hook remover, and (5) long nose pliers. The author, right, uses a Han-D-Gaff to unhook a catfish. Fresh or saltwater catfish can be dangerous.

By MAX HUNN



Photos By Kit and Max Hunn

(Continued from preceding page)

Holding the fish with her left hand—without a glove or a cloth—she was removing the solidly set hook when it happened! The tarpon gave a terrific jerk, twisted free, and buried one of the gang hooks in her finger.

She hung on desperately to keep him from tearing the flesh with his weight on the hook, as I hollered, "Slug him in the head with your pliers. Slug him hard!"

After three solid raps, the fish subsided, and she was able to get a new hold on his jaw with her grippers. Now we had a problem. The barb was buried too deep to be pulled out. We were miles from the nearest doctor. There was only one thing to do: cut the hook eye off and push the barb and shank on through.

Taking my pair of Sportmate hook-cutting pliers (no tackle box should be without good cutting pliers), I cut the treble hook high on the shank, then cut off the two free barbs and pushed the third one through the flesh of her finger until I could grasp the hook point with the pliers and pull it through. It's not an easy task, and should only be attempted when you're certain you can't get medical attention and reasonably sure you won't do any greater damage than the hook has already done. The next day, she got a tetanus shot when we got back to Miami. A rusty hook could have caused an infection. Fortunately, this one didn't.

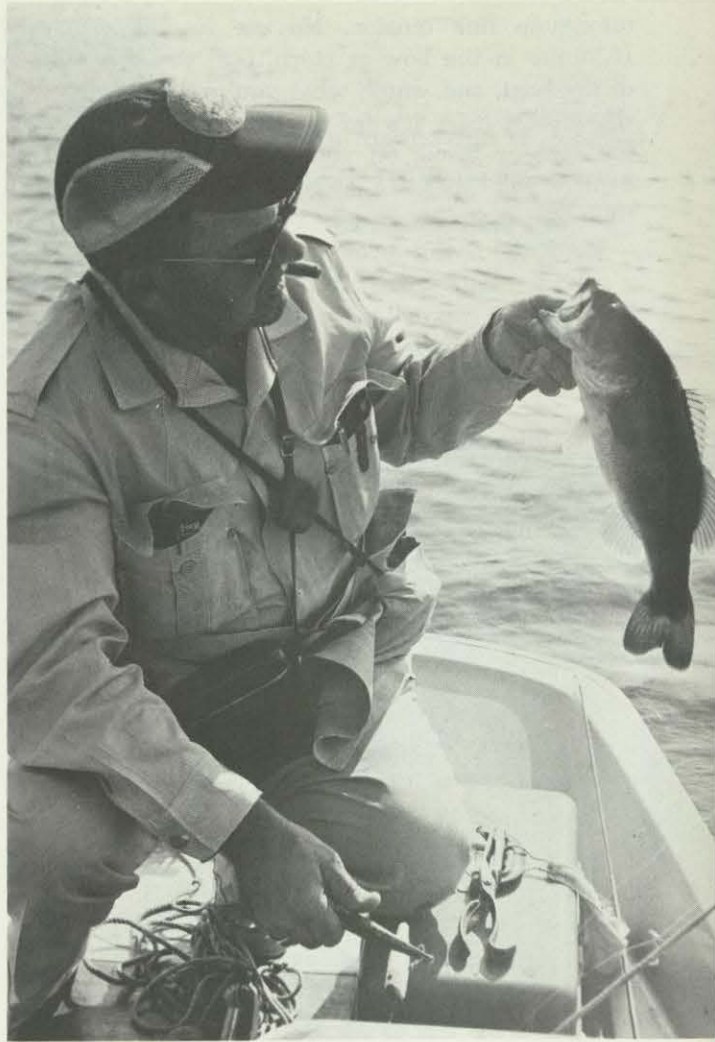
Kit doesn't handle any fish barehanded now. But you shouldn't have to learn the hard way. At least, we had the emergency gear in our tackle boxes. I hope never to have to use it, but I believe in having a little first aid kit in my tackle box, along with several types of pliers, and always a pair capable of cutting hooks fast.

I seem to be jinxed in this matter of cutting out hooks. Rick Cox, Kit, and I were eating in a cafe in the little hamlet of Suwannee after a fishing trip when I got involved in another such episode.

A woman came into the cafe, obviously very upset. She said something to the owner, who came over to our table and asked if we knew anything about cutting out hooks. We disclaimed any expertise but said we'd have a look at the situation. After stopping to get my hook cutting pliers, we went to the dock.

There, a young lad in his early teens was in a mess. He had a 3X treble gang hook, attached to a big salt water plug, through one of his fingers. It was an ugly situation. He had violated the old boating rule, *Don't stand up until you're docked*. His father, operating the boat, had hit the dock harder than expected. To keep his balance, the boy had grabbed at a heavy salt water trolling rod in an upright rod holder, and made the mistake of grabbing the plug! Result? A badly embedded hook.

I wanted no part of any surgery under these



circumstances. Rick and I huddled and decided the only thing to do was to cut the plug free and send the boy to a doctor in Gainesville for actual removal of the barb. I had no problem cutting the treble off the plug, and the boy was taken to the doctor. The next day, he was back fishing with a sore hand. Silly accident? Yes, but things do happen sometimes, although fishing isn't really a dangerous sport.

Handling your catch can cause problems. There are several safe methods for handling fish, but, unfortunately, they're too often ignored by anglers. Personally, I prefer to use a pair of aluminum clamps (grippers) to hold a fish by his jaw, while removing the lure with a pair of long-nosed pliers. This system keeps you from being too close to the fish. But even with this method, when you clamp down, mean business! A wriggling fish is hard to handle. The broad, serrated clamps are slip-proof only if you apply sufficient pressure.

For handling catfish, I prefer a device called "Hand-D-Gaff." It's a big clamp that enables you to hold your fish around the middle, exerting continuous pressure. As long as the clamp will hold two-thirds of your fish, you can exert excellent control. Catfish require particular attention. Not

only will they "horn" you, but they're dangerous if left underfoot. Their spines can penetrate thick-soled shoes.

Once in firm control with the "Hand-D-Gaff," you can remove the hooks either with a pair of needlenose pliers or with a pistol-grip hook remover. The latter offers the greatest protection, for your hand is 8 inches from the hook. But if you're removing a big plug, be alert for a sudden twist that could send a free gang hook into your hand.

Another system is using a glove on one hand, or a thick cloth. I use the cloth often on small fish, and keep an old towel fastened to the handle of my tackle box so I won't forget to have one when needed. Terrycloth makes an ideal gripper. It gives you a nonslipping hold, and normally you have no trouble if you really bear down. If you don't, well, even the cloth might not be enough protection. Naturally, don't grasp the fish too close to the embedded lure. Give yourself sufficient safety margin if he does flop.

There are other causes of casualties, usually minor at the time but potentially serious if an infection results. Any fish with spiny rays on the dorsal fin can cause trouble if you're careless, ranging from a skin prick to a gash. Even tiny

You can immobilize a largemouth black bass with a firm grip on the lower jaw, left, but it is still a good idea to use pliers to remove the hook. It is safer to use aluminum fish grippers when removing a hook, particularly if the fish is a husky specimen such as the bowfin, or mudfish, seen below.

Photos By Kit and Max Hunn



breem can prick you. If you must grasp your fish without some sort of protection, do so by pressing the dorsal fin downward, from front to back. Hold the spines firmly flat while you're unhooking. A safer method is laying the fish flat with the dorsal fin away from you and pressing heavily on its side with one hand while removing the hook with the other. This is fine for single hooks, but it's far safer to use a pair of pliers to remove a plug with gang hooks.

Fish handling is not the only source of potential casualties. Careless casting is even more dangerous.

Recently, I had to cut a plug off Buck Bray's back when he was hit accidentally by the middle man in our three-man boat. Our partner apparently had a fouled spinning line, and it went out just far enough to allow the plug to hit Buck. I cut the plug away, and he and our chagrined partner headed for Eustis and a hospital, leaving me behind with our boat.

Buck took it good naturedly, remarking he hoped three hits was the limit. He's a professional bass guide on the Withlacoochee River at Dunnellon and has had customers hit him in the head and in the other shoulder while casting. I agree that three should be more than the limit. It shouldn't happen, but, unfortunately, it does with wild, often inexperienced casters.

The cartoons about the careless angler who hooks his partner are funny unless you happen to be with a partner who whistles plugs past your ear all day. If he won't quit after you warn him, then spend your time with one eye on him, even if it means making fewer casts yourself. And drop him quickly as an angling buddy when you reach dry land. The risk of a plug in the ear is too, too great.

Anglers who persist in casting with too long a leader are plain dangerous. You don't need to have more than 9 to 12 inches of line out under normal conditions, but there are fishermen who use more, and their backcast is mighty, mighty dangerous.

There are other hazards that should be avoided. I detest anglers who refuse to keep their tackle boxes shut and locked. If you get a fish in the boat, or someone has to move while fighting a fish, the open box can spill. There're a lot more pleasant things than picking your way 'midst a bunch of loose plugs, sinkers, and hooks.

Also, don't leave extra plugs around on seats where they may be stepped on, or, worse yet, where someone might put his hand on them. I've seen anglers do this. They were just too lazy to put the plugs back in their tackle boxes. And be careful when you're carrying spare rods with plugs attached. Watch what you're doing, and don't put the plugs near your fishing partner. Keep your boat and gear shipshape and you're much less likely to become a fishing casualty through carelessness. It's not difficult to avoid most fishing accidents. Just use common sense. ●



Worse Than A Hunter

By ZACHARY WESTFALL

CAP'N DAVE CAME BY YESTERDAY MORNING. Drove up to the house in that rattling, mud-caked banzai pickup of his. I heard him coming and would have bailed out the back door except I was Z'd out on the couch in my skivvies and he sneaked up on me. That's the penalty for trying to rest on my day off.

I got up to let him in the door. A canoe was lashed to the top of his bus. Should have suspected something. Matter of fact, I did. Reacted too slow, though. Sleep-drugged, I guess.

"Get your shotgun and come on," he says.

"No way," I told him. "Man, it's still full summer. Too hot to mess around. Ain't nothin' legal game now anyway."

"Buddy, you been eatin' them stupid pills again," he answers. "You said you wanted to get checked out on this huntin' thing. You don't act like it. This is September one. Marsh hen time."

I stared out the front window. Grass in the front yard was dried up and scraggly looking. Burned up by the summer sun. We hassled over the thought of going anyplace very far away from the fan and well-stocked ice box. I hassled it, anyway. "Leave the house? Forget it!" I summed up my inflexible stand.

An hour later, Cap'n Dave eased his Jap junker into the questionable shade of a frizzled-looking pine alongside the roadway. Every way you looked was a wide, wide stretch of nothing but water, mud, and head high grass.

"Untie that line from the stern," he says, nautical-like. Since he was fiddling with the rope on the front end of the canoe, I guessed he meant for me to undo the back.

I only slipped once, taking a load of gear down a steep bank to the canoe. The water was salty. It

felt cooler than the air. Cap laughed. I chunked a mudball at him and he got indignant. Just like an old geezer of forty or so.

My shotgun was sticking upright in a mud bank. Like a harpoon in the backside of a whale. At least it didn't get a salt bath. Just about had all the mud poked out of the barrel with a long stick when a pickup pulled up behind Cap's. Couple of buddies of his. They made a bunch of noise, laughing and all that. These other guys had a canoe too. Another pair of idiots on the same trip as us. Made me feel a little better to know there was another couple on the loose besides me and the Cap'n.

We shoved off into the grassy jungle. I paddled, but I suspected Cap mostly coasted. Every time I looked back, he was dragging his blade in the water.

"Paddle! Paddle!" he'd holler. "We gotta get out there in the marsh. The tide's gettin' right," whatever that meant.

I got to thinking about the snipe hunt I went on when I was a tenderfoot scout in old Troop 699. It was a bummer. I was too green to know it. Found out later you don't hunt snipe with a gunny sack and a flashlight. Told Cap about it once. He laughed and said he'd take me on a real snipe hunt come winter when the season opened. I got news for him. Some of these old jokers will go to a lot of trouble to set up a guy for a yuk or two. One snipe hunt per man ought to be the lifetime limit.

While we were moving along, Cap was rapping about marsh hen hunting. Seems like on the Atlantic coast they pole a boat along the marsh and shoot rails—some guys call marsh hens that—when they panic and fly up. That sounds like a

good way to do it. Cap says we're not going to do it that way. We're going to mostly walk them up, the hard way. It figures, knowing Cap.

There're several different kinds of marsh hens, Cap says. The main ones, though, in this Gulf coast marsh (which sounds like kind of fancy talk for a huge, steam-heated mud puddle) are the clapper rail, the big one, and the little sora, that hasn't got much on a robin for size.

"This is it," says Cap. "Put her on the hill."

There wasn't any hill around there as far as I could see. Just sort of a low mud bank.

At Cap's instruction, the four of us spread out and started fighting our way through the bog. Mud was from ankle deep up to about the knee in spots. That grass was no joy either. Each blade was sharp-pointed. "Needlerush," Cap's buddy called it. It fit.

We'd bulled our way about two miles through the soup. I looked back at the canoes. Somebody must have moved them. There they were only a couple of hundred yards behind us.

Baroom! I jerked around just in time to see a darkish blob drop down into the grass.

"Missed him," somebody jeered.

"Nailed him," Cap said. Only we couldn't find the bird even with some close, careful looking.

Whatever, that shot seemed to have made the other marsh hens jittery. They started coming out of the grassy tangle at the rate of one every 50 yards or so. By the time we got to a long, low, muddy lump of an island—the remnants of an old dike, Cap said—we'd all had quite a few shots. There must have been some kind of tricky optical illusion at work. I know I'd fired a dozen shots or

so. Easy as it looked, I didn't have enough game in the bag to crowd my one-egg skillet. The others hadn't done too much better.

We rested on the old dike. That is, we rested after we finally put away the huge, evil-eyed rattler that Cap's buddy almost planked it on when he sat down to take five.

We put up a few more birds while circling back to the canoes. Heard several others. They've got a loony, staccato cackle—like they're laughing at you.

During that last 100 miles of grind, I gave a lot of thought to the jug of water waiting in the canoe. Finally made it. I never knew how good warm water could taste.

We messed around in the mud and grass well into late afternoon. When the tide was highest and much of the grass was flooded, we even put up a few birds from the canoe, just like they do on the northeast Florida marshes, according to Cap'n Dave.

Finally, it was time to quit. I was ready. We piled up our birds and took a head count. Considering how many shots we'd fired, it wasn't impressive.

That night, I dreamed of trudging, slow motion, through an endless quagmire grown up with needlerush.

"What's worse than a hunter?" the master of ceremonies boomed out.

"A guy who chases after marsh hens," I shot back.

The audience went wild. I'd won the \$10,000 jackpot. The noise woke me up. I moaned, tried to straighten out my muscle-cramped legs, and dropped back into an exhausted sleep. ●

Photo By Wallace Hughes

mud, water and sun make
a first hen marsh
hunt something to remember
—and dream about

The clapper rail, left, is the main object of Florida rail hunters' interest. Doing it the hard way, the hunters at right prepare to drive needlerush marsh. They'll spread out farther as hunt gets really under way.



a few ounces of
streamlined bird does
strange things to
many Florida hunters

Hunting the Gray Ghosts

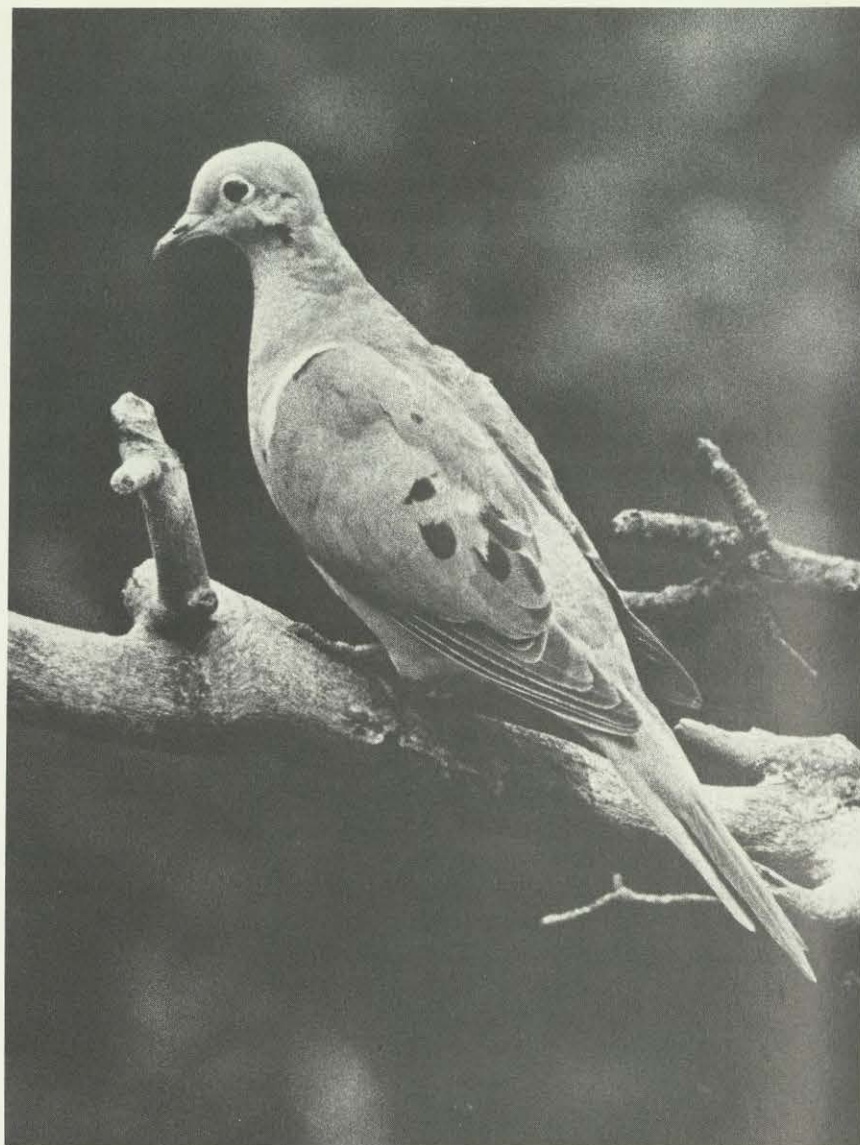


Photo By Wallace Hughes

WITH A SHOTGUN SPOTLESS to the point of luster, and four boxes of low brass No. 8s resting beside his folding camp stool, the hunter checked his watch for the fifteenth time in 15 minutes while awaiting the magic hour of high noon in the dove field early in October. His mind sort of eased over the question asked by his wife the previous night as he cleaned his 12-gauge pump for the second time in an hour: "What in the world possesses a 200-pound man to point a 7-pound shotgun at a 4-ounce bunch of gray feathers covering one bite of bird and squeeze the trigger three times, just so he can lie to his hunting buddies about his new ammunition producing dove-sized holes in the pattern?"

Rather than exaggerating, the hunter's bride, who had tolerated this manifestation of madness each year since they had been married, had come close to the truth as she once more saw the game bag stuffed with shells as her hero triumphantly left the house in time to make the legal noon shooting hour, to return that evening carrying a

limp piece of canvas, generally without enough birds to properly flavor the gravy.

Dove hunters are undoubtedly among the greatest optimists in the hunting fraternity. They continually trade cash for shells in great quantity, spend hour after hour on the skeet range to "sharpen the eye," buy cook books for the bride bearing savory recipes for preparation of the mourning dove, and know full well they aren't going to limit out unless a dozen birds fall out of the sky and break their necks on the pile of empty shell boxes he has scattered around his stand.

This darting dervish of the bird world is a productive creature with peak nesting periods beginning in May and June, according to biologists of the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission. Records indicate that one pair of doves may nest and bring off young five or six times in one year. Deeper into south Florida, immature doves have been found during all months of the year.

The young birds are first fed "pigeon milk," from the mother bird and are slowly "weaned" into

small seeds, until they are ready to leave the nest on about the 12th day. Then it's flocking time for the young birds, while the parents resume their nesting activities.

Although a rash of ill-informed preservationist activity in several northern states has resulted in the mourning dove being placed on the songbird list, biological research has long proven the average mortality rate of the dove may reach as high as 70% without hunter influence. Survival after this time period drops to 55% loss, again with the hunter having no influence.

Hunt figures gathered over the years by Commission Wildlife Management Division personnel and confirmed by surveys taken in other dove

hunting states throughout the Southeast, show the population of the mourning dove is reduced by less than 3 percent when all the data from the hunter-related mortality is totaled. Hardly a reason to ban the sport of dove hunting.

Doves, like waterfowl, are migratory birds, and the cold weather drives them from the central and northern states southward for the winter.

But the average hunter, while affected by any change in the dove hunting regulations, is interested primarily in the how-to of locating, shooting, dressing, and preparing the birds for the table. Population studies mean little to the guy who still remembers last year's one shot, as a darting, twist-

(Continued on next page)



Photo By Gene Smith

Photo By Art Runnels



By ROSS PARSONS

The "ghost" himself, far left, swift and erratic of flight, an artful dodger, and a challenge to the best of shooters. An appealing feature of dove hunting to the ones who dislike early morning rising, is fact that the daily shoot starts at noon. Within reason, the more hunters the better—to keep birds stirred up and flying. Sit and wait, left, is a common technique among hunters, with shirtsleeve weather prevailing most days in the dove field.

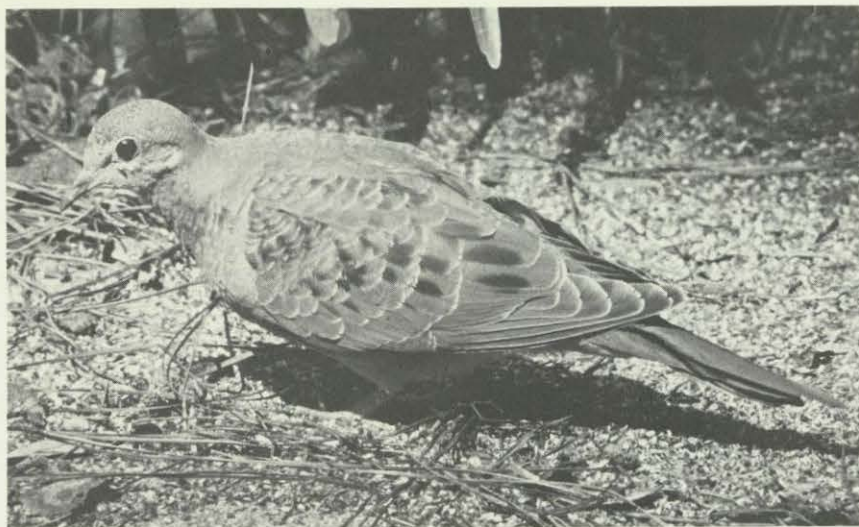


Photo By Wallace Hughes

A mourning dove may bring off five or six broods during a single season. In southern part of state, the nesting activities have been noted during every month of the year. The bird in photo at left is marked as a juvenile by the light edges of back and wing feathers (compare with previous photo of adult) that lack white markings. If hunters don't harvest the annual crop, nature will. A natural mortality of up to 70% of dove population each year is usual.

(Continued from preceding page)

ing, wheeling gray ghost fell to a perfectly timed and aimed charge of birdshot, especially when it was almost time to pack up for the day, and three of his hunting partners witnessed the feat and even back him up when the bragging begins.

Locating a suitable dove hunting area is accomplished in several different ways, from checking with the nearest Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission office for locations of public dove fields, to driving the backroads in search of corn, peanut, millet or similar seed grain crops which might be available to you simply for the asking, or, finally, to knowing someone who has already done the legwork and will invite you along.

The actual gun handling is a highly personal thing, demanding a certain minimum of coordination, a little practice on hand- or trap-thrown clay birds, some time spent watching the normal—if there is such a thing—flight pattern of the birds, and then some shooting at the real thing.

Once you down a bird or two, the preparation for the table is relatively simple if you do your plucking immediately. The more recent the kill, the easier it is to remove the feathers, which come off quite easily if the bird and the fingers are dry. A sharp knife will make removal of the innards easier, and soon a small package of highly edible bird is in your hand.

Cooking the birds can bring up almost as many suggestions and sage advice as tips on shooting, but when pan-fried in gravy (just like quail) and served over a bed of wild rice (just like ducks) and eaten in a properly appreciative manner (just like nothing you ever tasted), you will become one of those who spend a good portion of the deer and duck season talking about last opening day of the dove season, turning down some of the invitations to join the quail, deer, hog, or whatever hunts are scheduled, and polishing the shotgun and counting shells and days until once again the gray ghosts return. ●

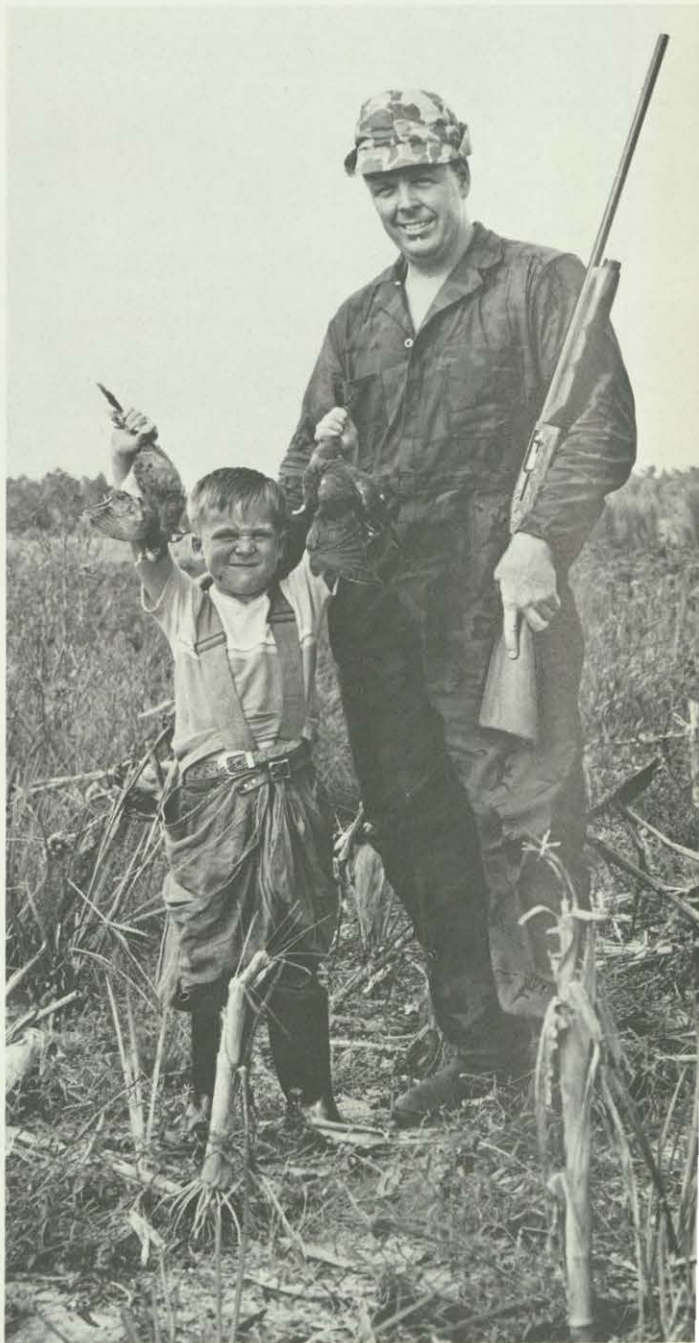


Photo By Gene Smith

Storing Ammunition

when is the fodder for "Old Betsy" too aged to perform properly?
the answer lies in just how and where you store the stuff



By EDMUND McLAURIN

AMONG THE MANY TECHNICAL QUESTIONS batted my way by shooters is one frequently repeated: "What is the useful life of modern ammunition?"

Invariably, the query is made because the individual seeking that specific information already has on hand metallic or shotshell ammunition left over from former years of shooting activity. (Odd lot ammunition holdovers dating back 10 years or more are relatively common among hunters.)

For the ammunition owner, the question has serious connotation. The shooter wants to know if he can depend on old rounds of ammunition for performance and firing safety. Also, the unused ammunition represents idle cash, considering the steadily increasing prices of sporting ammunition. Inwardly, the shooter nurses the hope that he can ultimately get full useful value from his investment. Such combined feeling is understandable; most of us share the same status.

The question is one that I can field without bobble. Simply, the answer is *indefinitely*—provided the ammunition receives proper owner care. Heat, moisture, and chemical action accelerated by changing temperature conditions are the primary causes of most ammunition deterioration and field firing failures.

Heat damage to ammunition can result if factory packaged or loose unfired rounds are long exposed to heat. Ammunition stored near the source of home heat, kept in metal yard utility building or in garage that is hot by day and cooler at night, carried in car glove compartment or tightly closed car trunk, or thoughtlessly left on windshield ledge or car seat that receives hot sun, will likely suffer deterioration of the priming mixture to the point that it may not ignite properly. Also, the powder can be affected by reduction of normal moisture content, to degree that there is marked increase (with some powders) in explosive strength and firing pressure.

In .30-06 caliber, normal firing pressure is close to 50,000 pounds per square inch (p.s.i.) in peak chamber pressure and blow-back pressure against rifle bolt face. Anything that tends to up this internal pressure can cause firing trouble, even if no personal danger is involved. A typical example occurred back in 1930 when I was firing the Model 1903 .30-06 caliber bolt-action military service rifle in national competition.

We had been issued brand new Springfields and .30 caliber ammunition containing Berdan-type primer, with corrosive properties (on firing) that made cleaning of rifle bores a daily chore. While state teams lolled, awaiting their calls to the firing line, idle rifles and ammunition were subjected to the hot sun. This exposure resulted in numerous firing line difficulties. Mostly, the increase in cartridge firing pressure swelled empty cases and locked bolts to such tightness that normal manual unlocking of bolts and extraction of fired cases was rendered difficult, and in some cases impossible. The matches had to be halted and a fresh lot of ammunition issued in substitution.

But that was a long time ago. Small arms ammunition, including that manufactured for the military, is now much superior, even though still of similar appearance. Brass cases are better and primers are noncorrosive.

All military .30-06 Ball M2 ammunition dated 1953 or later, and .30-06 AP M2 ammunition of 1955 or later manufacture, all .45 caliber pistol ammunition dated 1955 or later, and all .30M1

(Continued on next page)

Modern sporting equipment will last indefinitely if it is given reasonable care, as described by the author.



(Continued from preceding page)

Carbine ammunition can be considered noncorrosive and relatively superior to earlier cartridge loadings. The same holds true of U.S.-manufactured 7.62 NATO ammunition (same caliber as .308 Winchester sporting ammunition), except a small lot of 1956 Match ammunition made by Frankford Arsenal.

Modern .22 caliber rim fire ammunition, although now noncorrosive, is still often factory-coated with grease. Heat can liquify this lubricant and cause gradual seepage into powder and primer.

Too generous applications of protective gun coatings, like WD-40 and similar penetrating solutions, to a firearm kept loaded—as many home or business handguns are—can also cause ammunition failure, whether .22 rim fire or much larger center fire.

Use of plastic materials in the manufacture of shotshell cases has practically eliminated shotshell performance failures. No longer do unfired shell tubes absorb moisture and swell, as the old paper tubes did, and the plastic casings do not contain the wax that formerly tended to liquify under heat and gradually seep through paper shell tube into the powder. However, plastic shotshells *can* get too hot and develop higher than normal firing pressures if left in the sun.

Properly, reserve ammunition should be kept in a cool, dry place that is not subject to marked variation in daily temperature.

I elect to store and transport reserve ammunition in a thick-walled, tight-closing Thermos "Chilly Bin" foam ice chest—without the ice. Ammunition is first placed in a foam-lined, lid-closing wood box. This container in turn is put inside the "Chilly Bin." So stored, I find ammunition will remain fresh indefinitely, whether kept at home or carried afield.

Shotshells of buckshot and rifle slug loading, popular among deer hunters in the South, can easily be made up into handy reserve use packages that offer maximum idle life protection. Simply wrap three or five of the shotshells in aluminum foil, then slip each package inside its own tightly wrapped Baggie. Seal the outer wrapper with either Scotch or masking tape. Your reserve ammunition will be kept clean and protected until you are ready to open one or more of the small packages for immediate hunting use.

Because many of the popular center fire rifle calibers used in hunting are often teamed with exposed, unprotected soft lead bullets—a type highly vulnerable to nicks and gouges induced by field handling—this small packaging of reserve ammunition is a good idea for the hunter to consider.

Spraying cartridges with a commercial preparation known as "Krylon", an acrylic resin in a fast-drying solvent, is an easy way of waterproofing

and protecting unused ammunition, so that brass and primer will not tarnish or possibly absorb moisture at crimped points. It is important that only a very thin coating of the solution be applied. A little practice with the spray can's control button will enable you to apply just the right coating.

This recommended waterproofing of hunting ammunition holds especially true where the ammunition is home reloaded, with likely variation in primer seating seal and snugness of bullet inside the mouth of the cartridge case.

Modern ammunition will rarely let you down in critical moments—provided you give it reasonable chance for good performance by protecting it until curtain call.

THE NUMBER OF DEER HUNTERS who leave camp or car without their rifle ammunition is surprising! Even experienced hunters admit to one or more occasions of such forgetfulness.

You will never be without ammunition if you have a gunsmith install a Reinhart Fajen cartridge trap in the underside of your rifle's stock, near butt end, to accommodate three rounds of ammunition, then take care to keep the cartridge reservoir filled.

The cartridge holder is 11/16ths of an inch wide, with a 9/16 radius across its spring-locking cover. If your rifle stock has measurements that reflect sufficient radius and width at underside of butt (needed for installation), you may wish to have a gunsmith add this practical accessory before hunting season.

To permit use with gun sling swivel in buttstock, the cartridge trap housing comes with a sling swivel hole. Also, the cartridge trap may be installed in reverse, if desired, so that the sling swivel is close to the rifle's buttplate—something easily done if the gunstock is of Monte Carlo type, where there is usually extra depth of wood forward of the butt.

The trap provides silent, easy-access storage of three rounds of emergency ammunition.

Photo shows a cartridge trap in underside of rifle's stock.



To eliminate rattle, each stored cartridge rests on counterbored shoulders of holes drilled in butt-stock, and are held motionless by spring pressure of a trap door padded with felt. Metal parts are gun blue finish.

Since the Fajen cartridge traps are made for specific rifle calibers, it is necessary that your gunsmith order the size that corresponds to the caliber of your hunting rifle, along with technical information about make and model of rifle and type of stock.

Reinhart Fajen, Inc., P. O. Box 338, Warsaw, Missouri 65355, is the source of supply.

INTERESTING TEXTS BY CONTEMPORARY outdoor writers and research technicians invariably attract and hold my attention throughout their length, and especially so when they contain factual bits of information that serve to enhance my knowledge.

Such a text has been authored by Louise B. Young, of Winetka, Illinois, in an Oxford University Press book called *Power Over People*.

It is not, as the title suggests, a sequel to Norman Vincent Peale's book *The Power of Positive Thinking*, but a subject devoted to the ways and whims of electrical energy transmitted via towers and lines.

Overhead power lines are commonly found close to every community. In providing different communities and areas with electric power, the lines stretch across farm lands and through wilderness areas to still other places of need. Those that pass through wilderness areas usually have cleared rights-of-way on both sides of the lines, creating long lanes of visibility for hunters watching for game. Many an unsuspecting buck feeding along one of these cleared lanes, or crossing one, has been bagged by an alert hunter. In fact, during hunting season, a long, cleared stretch of terrain bordered by brush, as provided by a power line route, can be one of the most productive locations for a deer hunter on stand.

Mostly, these continuous power transmission lines are supported from steel framework towers placed practical distances apart. Lines carrying electrical loads as high as 765,000 volts are not uncommon, and new installations under the nation's increased energy program are being planned to carry up to 2,000,000 volts.

Invariably, these transmission lines comprise heavy, uninsulated wires in parallel arrangement at relatively low overhead height—sometimes only 40 or 50 feet above ground.

Many a deer hunter has taken up silent vigil under one of the strategically spaced supporting steel towers, or crouched close to a tower on open farmland while waiting for approaching flights of doves.

Although most hunters—even the irresponsible

types—are aware of the danger of foolishly shooting at connecting insulators, or at winged targets passing close to the power lines, few are even remotely aware that there is a continuously active electrical field that blankets everything near a line in variable degrees of intensity, depending upon atmospheric conditions and other influencing factors.

This electrical field is so commonly strong, research technician Louise B. Young reports, that one can walk in close proximity to one of these rural transmission lines, holding an ordinary fluorescent lamp bulb in the hand (without benefit of battery power, cord, or other ground connection) and have the bulb light up—tangible proof that an electrical energy field does exist under and close to these transmission lines, and that it affects objects within its energy reach!

My curiosity was aroused by *Power Over People*, so I carried out my own tests at five different locations, all of late evening but on different dates.

At three of the five locations, a carried-in-hand fluorescent lamp lit up when introduced into the immediate areas of transmission line towers!

The two failures may have been due to any of several possibly influencing conditions—the much higher heights of two of the towers, and fewer strung lines; or possibly more natural grounding of extraneous electrical energy at one or more small area spots that I failed to walk through. Differences in humidity could have been another factor.

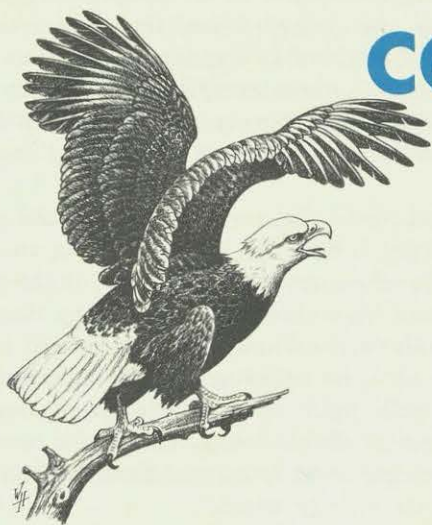
But the impact of my three successful experiments cannot be lightly dismissed from mind. Ground level electrical current fields *do* exist in close proximity to high voltage transmission lines!

Just what harmful effect, if any, such an electrical field exerts on a hunter temporarily occupying a spot within the field has not been specifically determined.

However, it is of medical record that linemen who do repair work on overland electrical energy transmission lines, and who are repeatedly exposed to existing unrestrained electric current fields, commonly complain of headaches and general feeling of malaise.

Similarly, experiments conducted on mice, during which they were exposed to high voltage transmission line electrical fields for a portion of each day over a 10-month period, reportedly showed radical changes in their cellular chemistry and genetic patterns.

Wherever a test substantiates that a field of loose electrical energy exists sufficiently to light up an ordinary fluorescent tube carried in the hand, a hunter can rightly conclude that he is also being bombarded with ultimately harmful electric currents. It is something to keep in mind, when still-hunting close to rural power transmission lines. ●



CONSERVATION SCENE

Date Correction

BOWHUNTERS, PLEASE MARK YOUR calendars. The archery season is September 6 through September 28. Because of a printing error, the season closing date was incorrectly given in the current Hunting and Fishing Regulations Summary booklet (page 23) and in the July issue of *Florida Wildlife* (page 6).

Carp Control

EFFORTS ARE UNDER WAY at Richloam Hatchery in Sumter County to develop a nonreproducing monosex grass carp population. If successful, such a population could be useful in the control of certain noxious aquatic plants, without posing the threat of a runaway grass carp population explosion that could have serious environmental effects.

Take the Course

SPORTSMEN'S CLUBS IN FLORIDA are being invited to sponsor a hunter and firearm safety course in their community. The invitation is part of the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission's effort to expand its volunteer hunter and firearms safety program.

Lt. Berger Howard, northwest regional firearms safety supervisor, passed the invitation on recently to clubs in that area.

"It comes," Howard said, "during the time when many clubs suffer from lack of interest, and it can help revitalize the club. It is also a project in which not only members but their families can participate and benefit."

Under the program, the Commission would arrange for instructors and provide the materials for the course. The participating club would provide a meeting place and suitable firing range.

The course includes 12 hours of classroom instruction and time on the firing range and practical field course. Anyone 10 years of age or older who satisfactorily completes the course will be certified as a "safe hunter." Many states now require this certification before sportsmen may obtain a hunting license.

Clubs seeking more information about the course or who wish to sponsor one can contact a firearm safety officer by calling these toll free numbers:

Lt. Berger Howard, Panama City 1-800-342-1676

Lt. Jim Robinson, Lakeland 1-800-282-8002

Lt. Ed Tyer, Lake City 1-800-342-8105

Lt. Murray Gaskins, West Palm Beach 1-800-432-2046

Lt. Haskel Davis, Ocala 1-800-342-9620

Duck Relocation

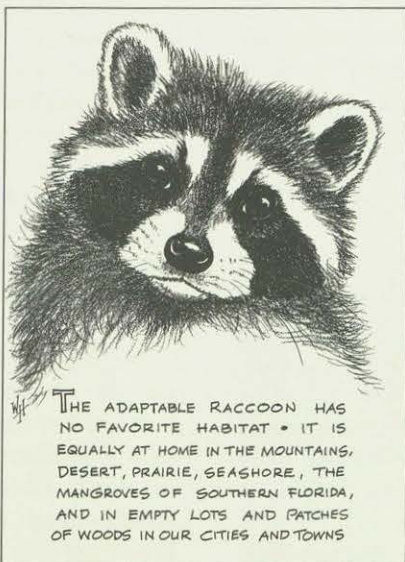
THE COMMISSION HAS APPROVED live-trapping of from 100 to 150 Florida Ducks here for release by the South Carolina Wildlife Resources Department in the coastal areas of that state. In discussing the request for the birds, Commission Director O. Earle Frye, Jr., pointed out that South Carolina was most cooperative in providing striped bass during the G&FWFC's efforts to get its striper project underway. In authorizing the shipment of the ducks, the Commission agreed that this would be a fair exchange for past generosity.

Both sexes of the Florida Duck resemble the hen mallard—which gives rise to the common name "Florida mallard." Unlike most other waterfowl, the Florida Duck is nonmigratory.

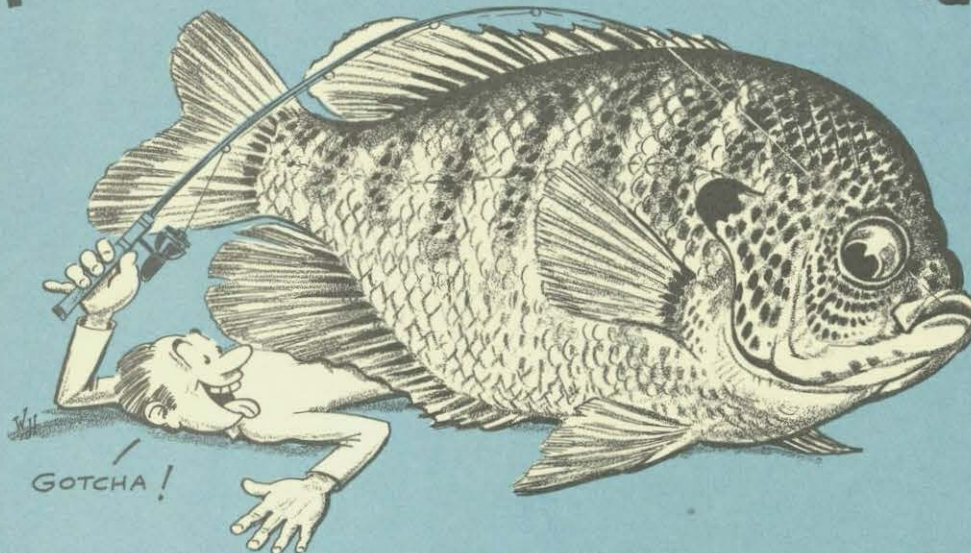
Arrest Figures

DURING THE THREE-MONTH period from April 1 through June 30, a total of 1,852 arrests were made by Commission wildlife officers. This is 100 more arrests than were made during the same period last year. Most citations involved hunting and fishing violations, but there were also 19 drug cases, 16 traffic cases, 7 resisting arrest charges, and 327 cases relating to boating activity.

Approximately 550 man-hours were expended by Commission wildlife officers in patrol and rescue activities when flood waters forced 1,500 residents from their homes and businesses in Washington, Holmes, and Walton counties earlier in the year.



For that BIG ONE that didn't get away!



WHO
CAUGHT
WHO?



ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS SPECIES

LARGEMOUTH BASS

.....8 pounds or larger

STRIPED BASS

.....10 pounds or larger

CHAIN PICKEREL

.....4 pounds or larger

BLUEGILL (BREAM)

.....1 1/2 pounds or larger

SHELLCRACKER

.....2 pounds or larger

BLACK CRAPPIE

.....2 pounds or larger

REDBREAST

.....1 pound or larger

TO BE ELIGIBLE . . .

all fish must have been taken from the fresh waters of the State of Florida, on conventional tackle, with live or artificial bait, in the presence of at least one witness. The catch must have been weighed and recorded at a fishing camp, tackle shop, or similar establishment, by the owner, manager, or an authorized employee. No citation will be issued for a record-sized catch unless fish was preserved for examination.

FLORIDA WILDLIFE'S FISHING CITATION

is available without charge to subscribers to FLORIDA WILDLIFE Magazine and their immediate families who catch any of the listed freshwater fish of the prescribed minimum size. A citation for framing will be mailed to the applicant upon receipt of the following application form properly filled out and signed. Only those applications received within 90 days of the date of catch will be honored.

APPLICATION FOR FLORIDA WILDLIFE FISHING CITATION

The Editor, FLORIDA WILDLIFE

Date _____

Game & Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Fla. 32304

Please send me the Florida Wildlife Fishing Citation with the inscribed data listed below:

Name (please print) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip No. _____

Species _____ Weight _____ Length _____

Type of Tackle _____

Bait or Lure Used _____

Where Caught _____ in _____ County

Date Caught _____ Catch Witnessed By _____

Registered, Weighed By _____ At _____

Signature of Applicant _____

CUT OUT AND SAVE THIS APPLICATION BLANK



Clapper Rail

Photo by Wallace Hughes

Check one

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Paste recent magazine label into space indicated, show change on form and mail.

Attach recent magazine address label here for renewal or change of address.

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